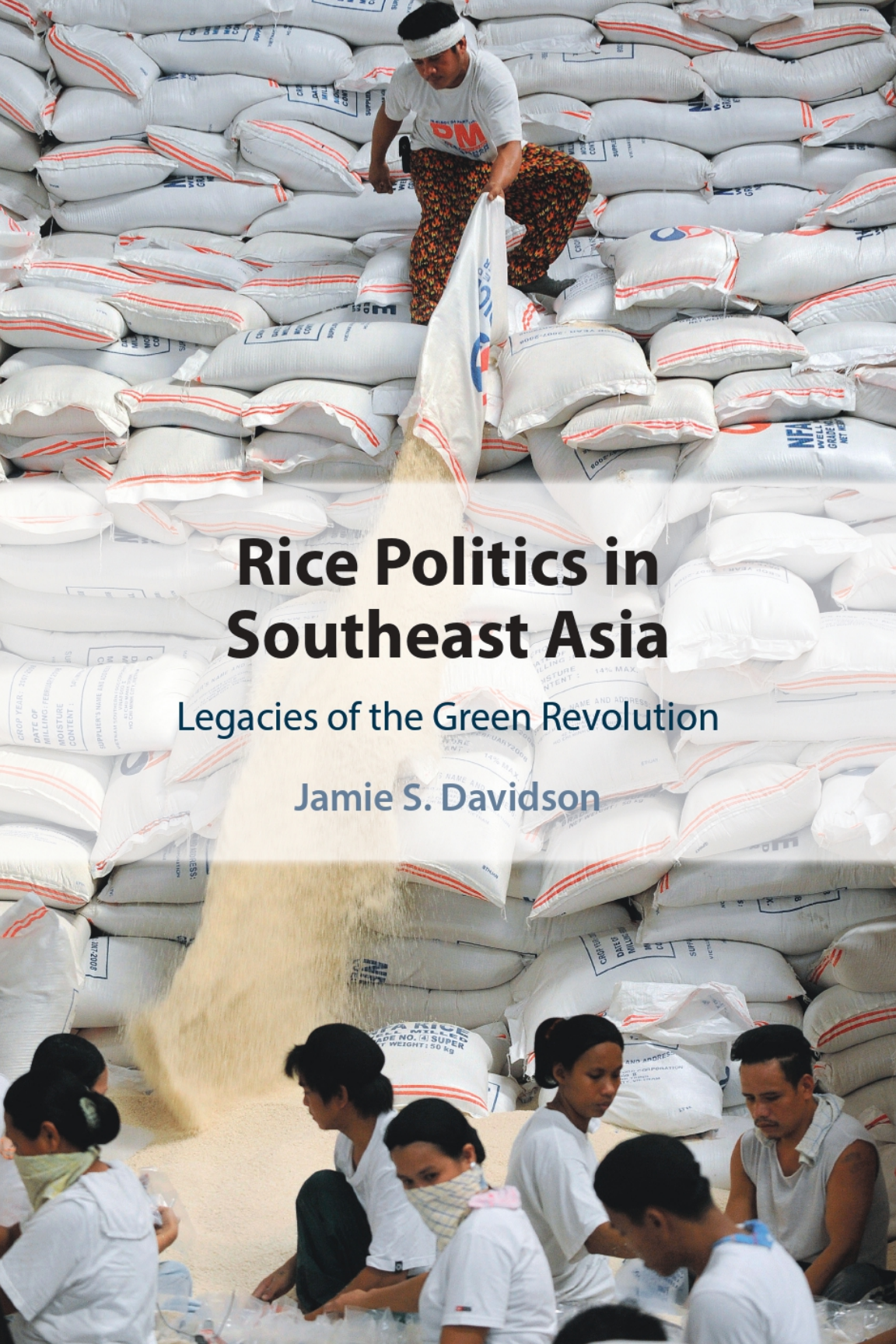


Rice Politics in Southeast Asia

Legacies of the Green Revolution

Jamie S. Davidson

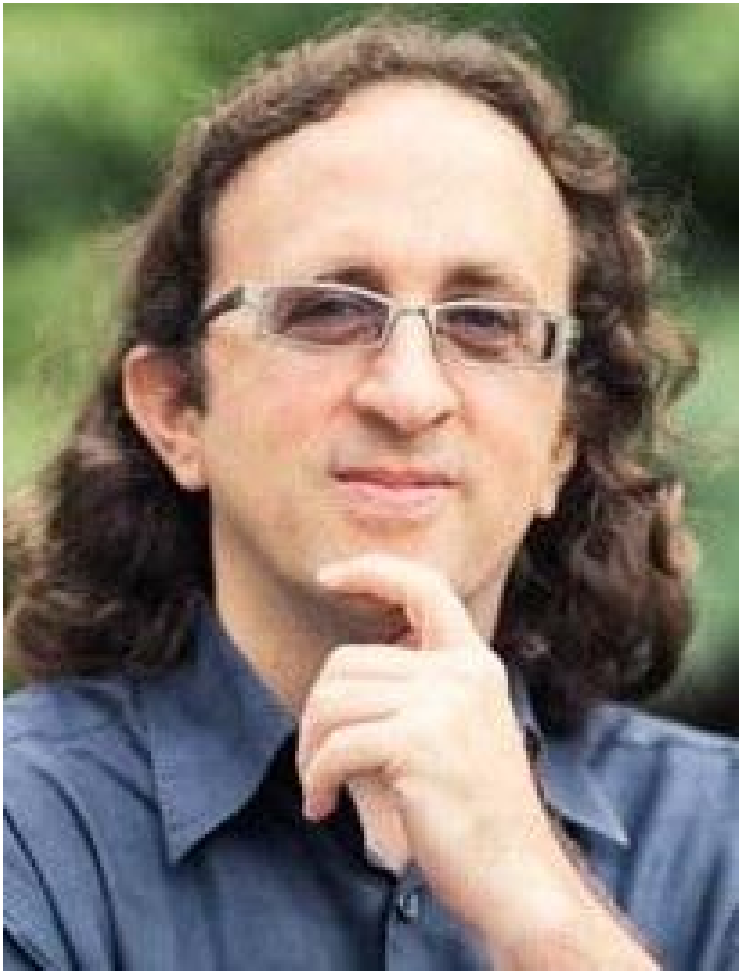
NUS

National University
of Singapore

Rice Politics in Southeast Asia

Rice is the foremost foodstuff in terms of caloric intake for Southeast Asians and for bolstering national food security. Yet writings on the region's politics have overlooked the crucial role rice production programs have played in shaping signal political and development outcomes. In this comparative historical analysis, Jamie S. Davidson argues that the performance legitimacy stemming from the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, along with the formation of rice import regimes, best explains durable rice protectionism in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, the region's large rice importers. Even though the direct effects of the Green Revolution eventually faded, he demonstrates that past policy success can inform policymaking for decades after remarkable sectoral performance subsides. This innovative account and its conclusions will be of interest to scholars and students of development studies, comparative political economy, and Asian studies.

Jamie S. Davidson teaches political science at the National University of Singapore, where he also heads the Asia Research Institute's Food Politics and Society research cluster.



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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009624640

DOI: 10.1017/9781009624633

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When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009624633

First published 2026

Cover image: A worker empties sacks of imported Vietnamese rice / ROMEO GACAD / AFP via Getty Images

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 978-1-009-62464-0 Hardback

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In memory of Tony, Merle, Gavin, and Joel – early ARI giants

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Acknowledgments

In the *Memoirs of Hadrian* (1955), the Belgian-born French novelist, Marguerite Yourcenar, imagines the Roman emperor writing a long letter to his adoptive son and successor. In it he advises: "I had reached the point where I felt that the most ordinary debate on such a subject as importation of Egyptian wheat would have taught me more about government than would the entire Republic of Plato." I hope readers of *Rice Politics in Southeast Asia* similarly learn about the relationship between importations of a different staple, that of rice, and the workings of government in the cases that this book covers. That said, I must admit, like most research monographs, this one took too long to write, was not preordained to materialize, and did so only with the godsend of a good many people. Wise counsel began with advice from Doug Kammen long ago. Michael Montesano, Nick Kuipers, and Colum Graham joined as sagacious sounding boards. I am grateful to Kathy Burke, Ian Chong, Colm Fox, Merlin Francis, Colum Graham, Nick Kuipers, Li Shumeng, Gedeon Lim, Michael Montesano, Deepak Nair, William Nessen, Elvin Ong, Subhasish Ray, Portia Reyes, Jacob Ricks, Emily Soh, and Mark Stanford for offering constructive feedback on earlier parts of the manuscript. I am humbly and deeply appreciative of the close attention paid to detail, coherence, and consistency by two reviewers of the Cambridge University Press. Their knowledge of Southeast Asia and of the political economy of agriculture is astounding. Lucy Rhymer of the Press proved once again to be editor extraordinaire; her professionalism is unrivaled. Rosa Martin's dedication to correspondence on the publication process easily surpassed expectations. Triena Ong edited the text with a deft touch, and Kate Blackmer has mad mapmaking skills.

One grant (FRC Tier I R-108-000-070-112) via my home institution funded initial fieldwork; another (FASS Book Grant Scheme) enabled the book's completion. Innumerable folks charitably taught me about all things rice. Whether they are cited in the book or not, I am indebted to all. I cordially salute attentive librarians and staff at the Agriculture Ministries in Putra Jaya, Jakarta, and Manila, at the US Archives in

College Park, IRRI, the Lopez Museum of Manila, Ateneo de Manila University, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak-Institute, NUS Central Library, Bernas, Bulog, and the NFA. I had the good fortune to send a cold email to Fatimah Mohamed Arshad, then director of the Laboratory of Agriculture and Food Policy at the University Putra Malaysia, to sponsor my fieldwork. Ever since, I have learned heaps from her about rice and about Malaysia, perhaps about *teh tarik kurang manis* above all else.

I record profuse thanks to those attached to and involved in workshops, lectures, and conferences in Singapore, Kaohsiung, Prato, Seattle, Dasmariñas, Putra Jaya, Shah Alam, Melbourne, Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Jember (online), Surabaya, and Malang. They provided me with invaluable opportunities to mold the material that comprises the book. Mark Thompson's invitation to present at the Southeast Asia Research Centre of The City University of Hong Kong during the writing's critical late stage was especially useful, as were comments from Mark and Diego Fossati.

Portions of the book draw on material previously published as "Stagnating Yields, Unyielding Profits: The Political Economy of Malaysia's Rice Sector," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 49, 1 (2018): 105–28; and "Rice Imports and Electoral Proximity: The Philippines and Indonesia Compared," *Pacific Affairs*, 91, 3 (2018): 445–70. Through a separate review process, unwittingly I became the proud recipient of the wisdom of the late Randy Barker.

Five dead masters – Miles, Keith, Oscar, Jerry, and John – unfailingly buoyed spirits. Dan's example is steadfast. My mother's bravery in the face of my father's passing is awe-inspiring. Portia endured incessant nagging to lend her encyclopedic knowledge of the Philippines with exceptional charm, grace, and patience. This book is as much hers as it is mine (at least the passable parts). Ami and Sam have grown into inquisitive, resilient teenagers since I last wrote a similar note. With justifiable skepticism, they are navigating a world that unkindly we have bequeathed to them and their generation. My love for them and for Portia remains boundless. I close with an affectionate ruffle for Ferris and his line of *gigil* predecessors. May he be chomping on the bars when this book sees the light of day.

Guilin View, Singapore
June 2025

Abbreviations

1MDB	1Malaysia Development Berhad
ACCFA	Agricultural Credit and Cooperative Financing Administration
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AER	Action for Economic Reforms
AFA	Area Farmers' Associations
AFC	Asian Financial Crisis
APE	Agricultural Political Economy
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BAL	Basic Agrarian Law
Bernas	Padiberas Nasional Berhad; National Rice and Paddy Company
Bersatu	Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia; Malaysian United Indigenous Party
BGSB	Budaya Generasi Sdn Berhad
Bimas	Bimbangan Massal; Mass Guidance
BLT	Bantuan Lansung Tunai; Direct Cash Assistance
BN	Barisan Nasional; National Front
BOC	Bureau of Customs
BPNT	Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai; Non-Cash Food Assistance Program
BPP	Badan Pembelian Padi; Body for the Purchase of Paddy
BPS	Badan Pusat Statistik; Central Statistics Bureau
BRI	Bank Rakyat Indonesia; Indonesian People's Bank
BTI	Barisan Tani Indonesia; Indonesian Peasants' Front
Bulog	Badan Urusan Logistik; State Logistics Board
CARP	Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
Confed	Confederation of Grain Associations
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
CSO	civil society organization

DA	Department of Agriculture
DAP	Democratic Action Party
DAP	Disbursement Acceleration Program
DRB-HICOM	Diversified Resources Berhad – Heavy Industries Corporation of Malaysia Berhad
FACOMAS	Farmers' Cooperative Marketing Associations
FAMA	Food and Agriculture Marketing Agency
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
Felda	Federal Land Development Authority
FO	Farmers' Organizations
FSPI	Federasi Serikat Petani Indonesia; Federation of Indonesian Farmers' Unions
GABETA	Gabungan Membela Hak Petani; Association of the Defense of Farmers' Rights
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMP	Guaranteed Minimum Price
Golkar	Golongan Karya; Functional Groups Party
Grecon	Confederation of Grain Retailers Associations
GSDP	Grains Sector Development Program
GST	Goods and Services Tax
HKTI	Himpunan Kerukunan Tani Indonesia; Indonesian Farmers' Association
IACRC	Inter-Agency Committee on Rice and Corn
IADA	Integrated agriculture development area
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IFI	International financial institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPO	Initial Public Offering
IRRI	International Rice Research Institute
ISI	Import-Substitution Industralization
JAC	Japanese Agricultural Cooperatives
JTM	Jabatan Telekom Malaysia; Malaysian Telecommunications Company
KADA	Kelantan Agricultural Development Authority
KLSE	Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange
Lakas-Laban	Lakas ng Bayan-Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino; Strength of the Nation-Struggle of Democratic Filipinos
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
LGU	Local Government Unit

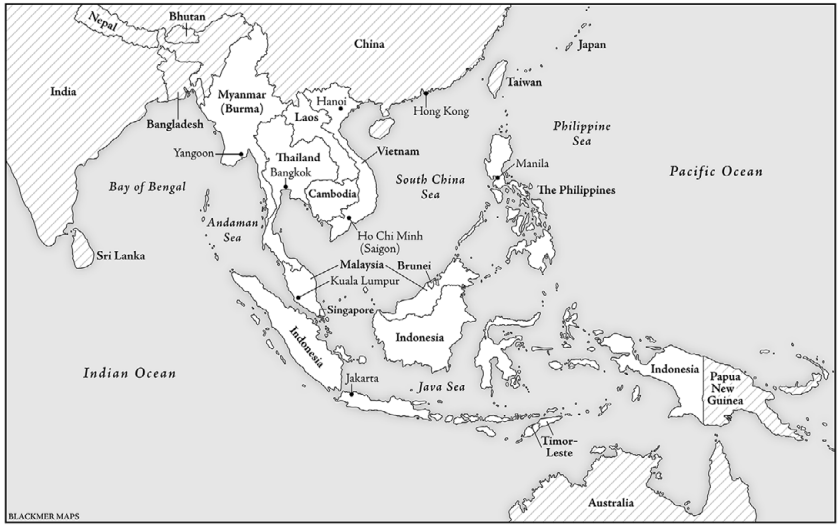
LPN	Lembaga Padiberas Nasional; National Rice and Paddy Board
MADA	Muda Agricultural Development Authority
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries
Mardi	Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute
MAV	minimum annual volume
MCA	Malayan/Malaysian Chinese Association
MCO	Movement Control Order
MIC	Malayan/Malaysian Indian Congress
MVs	modern varieties
Nafas	Pertumbuhan Peladang Kebangsaan; National Farmers' Organization
Naric	National Rice and Corn Corporation
Nasdem	Nasional Demokrat; National Democratic Party
NEDA	National Economic and Development Authority
Nekmat	Persatuan Nelayan Kebangasaan; Association of National Fishermen
NEP	New Economic Policy
NFA	National Food Authority
NGA	National Grains Authority
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NU	Nahdlatul Ulama; Revival of Islamic Scholars' Organization
NVM	New Village Movement
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
OLT	Operation Land Transfer
OOP	Office of the Presidency
OPK	Operasi Pasar Khusus; Special Market Operation
PAN	Partai Amanat Nasional; National Mandate Party
PAS	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia; Malaysian Islamic Party
PDI	Partai Demokrasi Indonesia; Indonesian Democratic Party
PDI-P	Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan; Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle
PDP-Laban	Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan; Philippine Democratic Party-Strength of the Nation
Perpadi	Perkumpulan Penggilingan Padi dan Pengusahah Beras; Association of Rice and Rice Milling Entrepreneurs of Indonesia

PH	Pakatan Harapan; Alliance of Hope
PIDS	Philippine Institute of Development Studies
PKB	Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa; National Reawakening Party
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia; Indonesian Communist Party
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat; Peoples Justice Party
PKS	Partai Keadilan Sejahtera; The Prosperous and Justice Party
PL	Public Law
PLI	poverty line index
PM	Prime Minister
PN	Perikatan Nasional; National Alliance
PNB	Philippine National Bank
PPBM	Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia; Malaysian United Indigenous Party
PPI	Philippine Peasant Institute
PR	Pakatan Rakyat; Peoples Alliance
PRMB	Padi and Rice Marketing Board
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority
QR	Quantitative Restrictions
RA	Republic Act
Raskin	Beras untuk Rakyat Miskin; Rice for the Poor
Rastra	Beras untuk Keluarga Sejahtera; Rice for Prosperous Families
RCA	Rice and Corn Administration
RCEF	Rice Competitive Enhancement Fund
RCPCC	Rice and Corn Production Coordination Council
Ricob	Rice and Corn Board
RIDA	Rural and Industrial Development Authority
RTL	Rice Tariffication Law
SOE	state-owned enterprise
SONA	State of the Nation Address
SPI	Serikat Petani Indonesia; Union of Indonesian Peasants
ST15	*Super Tempatan*; Super Local variety (from 15 percent)
TPS	Tiga Pilar Sejahtera
TRAIN	Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VMF	Sticting Het Voedingsmiddelenfonds; Food Supply Board

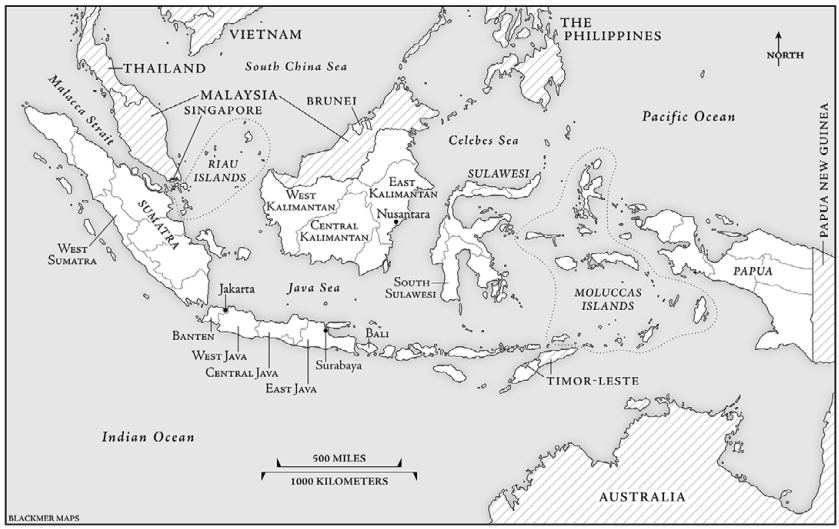
VSS	voluntary separation scheme
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWI	First World War
WWII	Second World War
YUBM	Yayasan Urusan Bahan Makanan; Food Affairs Board

Glossary

banteng	water buffalo
bumiputera	native son
cacqiue	large landowner
desa	village
ganta	volume of measurement (for paddy, the Philippines)
kampung	village
metizo	mixed-heritage/race
padi	paddy; unhusked rice (Malaysia, Indonesia)
palay	paddy; unhusked rice (The Philippines)
peso	Philippine currency (PhP)
petani	peasant, smallholder
pikul	measurement of weight (for paddy, Malaysia)
pribumi	native son
principalia	local, native elite
ringgit	Malaysian currency (M$; RM)
rupiah	Indonesian currency (Rp.)
sari-sari	local variety shop
tani	peasant, smallholder
Tugu Tani	Peasant Statue
wong cilik	little/common people/person

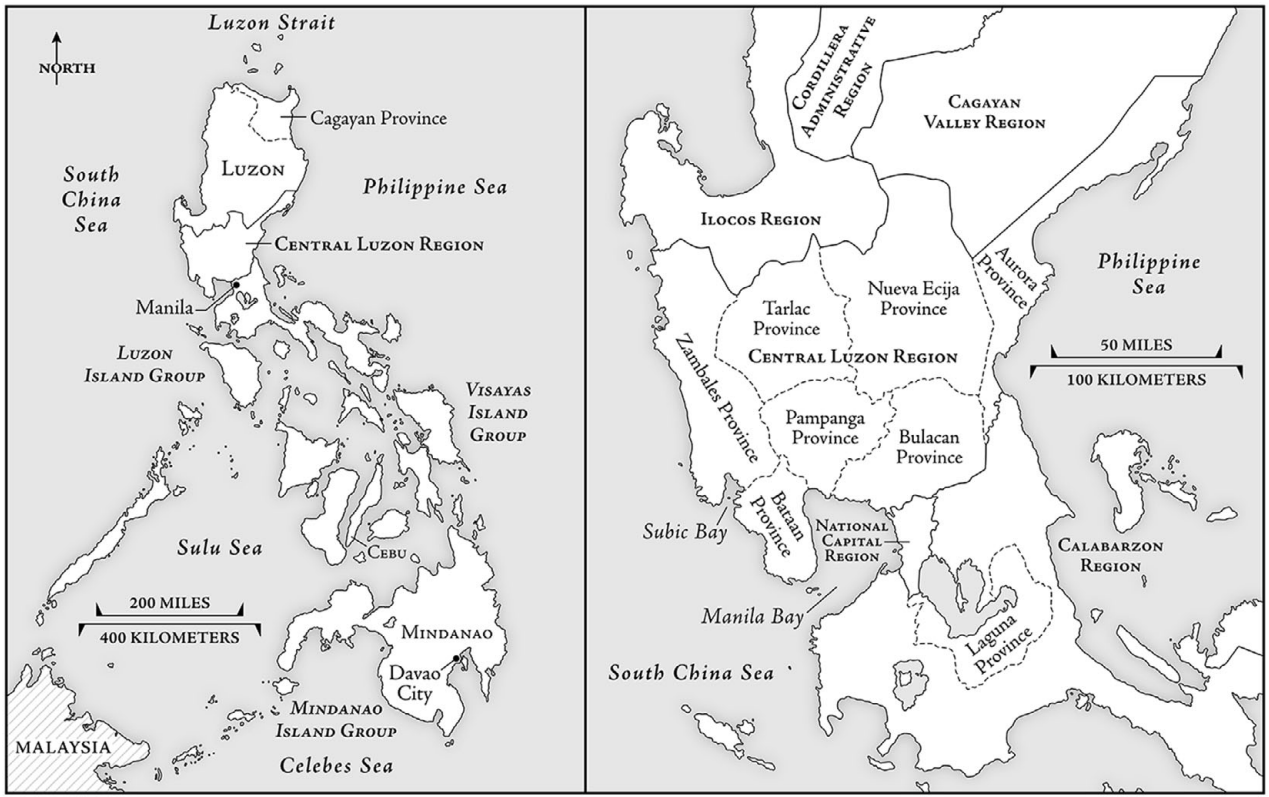


Map 1 - Map of Southeast Asia



Map 2 - Map of Indonesia

Map 3 - Map of Malaysia



Map 4 - Map of The Philippines

Introduction

> Wherever high-cost production of grain was allowed to remain in Europe in the face of the availability of cheap grain from overseas, deep and lasting conflicts for and against protection came to dominate the political scene.
>
> Alexander Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (1943)

The livelihood of millions of people in Southeast Asia directly depends on the production and marketization of rice. For many millions more, rice is the foremost foodstuff in terms of caloric intake, despite rising income levels across the region, which tends to lead to a diversification of food staples.[1] Because of rice's fundamental importance to diets, in incomes, and hence in bolstering food security, writings on rice in the region confirm the grain's prominent political significance.

Broadly, the rice-growing states of Southeast Asia fall into two categories: mainland exporters and sprawling archipelagic countries that produce ample yet insufficient quantities to negate the need for regular imports. Governments in the former face fewer pressing dilemmas when it comes to addressing national food security, since supply is plentiful.[2] That surplus has helped to feed Asia for more than a century.

This book is more interested in the group of net-importing states of island Southeast Asia. Among them, Indonesia is the closest to attaining full self-sufficiency in rice (93–99 percent), followed by the Philippines (85–95 percent) and Malaysia (59–75 percent).[3] I am not overly concerned with explaining technical reasons for their rice-deficient status. Research elsewhere has demonstrated that the lack of wide fertile river deltas, alluvial plains, and unfavorable cultivatable land-to-people ratios in large part accounts for this condition.[4] Instead, this study focuses on

[1] Dawe, Pandey, and Nelson 2010.

[2] The standard definition of food security is the Food and Agricultural Organization's: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets that their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO 2009, p. 8).

[3] Sarena 2019, figure 1.8, p. 9; Otsuka 2021, figure 4, p. 326.

[4] Dawe 2006.

the political and economic implications of being rice deficient. For generations, politicians and policymakers in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia have sought to surmount the enduring obstacles of geography and demography by spending valuable public resources on campaigns to encourage cultivation. They have done so to such an extent that efforts draw the consternation of others more trustful in the tenets of comparative advantage and the benefits that international trade may bring.[5] The cost savings arising from, and the simplicity of, purchasing more abundant volumes of cheaper rice from Vietnam, Thailand, and elsewhere appeal to market advocates. This book submits that the protracted bruising tussles behind the politics of these paddy production endeavors and their detractors are fruitfully explored in comparative historical perspective.[6]

The Protectionist Net Importers of Southeast Asia

This deficiency dilemma does not make rice inherently more politicized in the net-importers than in exporting counterparts. Elites in the latter also exploit the grain's political properties to their advantage. Illustratively, in 2014, Thailand's military used the bungling of a terribly expensive pledging scheme that aimed to guarantee paddy growers inflated floor prices for their crop as a pretext to topple the country's democratically elected government.[7]

At the same time, there are compelling reasons to narrow this book's scope to the rice politics of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. At some 425 million people, their combined population is nearly twice the size that of the United Kingdom, Germany, and France together. These net importers also share a history of domination of their respective postharvest marketing systems by a class of local ethnic Chinese traders and merchants. More remarkably, for decades governments in these three states have pursued major food security strategies with striking similarity, converging around a set of protectionist policies. Key components of this protectionism found across this book's three cases include:

i) The tendency to equate rice production with food security;
ii) Resiliency. Despite reform attempts by influential foreign and domestic actors, heavy state intervention has survived decades of political

[5] A major text representing this viewpoint is entitled *Trusting Trade and the Private Sector for Food Security in Southeast Asia* (Alavi, Htenas, Kopicki, *et al.* 2012).
[6] Paddy is threshed unmilled (or unprocessed) rice. Rice and paddy can be used interchangeably, except in discussions of measurements of weight, since paddy is heavier than rice, and in discussions of marketing and consumption.
[7] Ricks 2018.

and economic change in Indonesia and Malaysia, and was only partially dismantled in the Philippines as late as 2019;

iii) The persistency of domestic rice priced measurably above world market prices;

iv) A steady drumbeat of state-led production programs to lift self-sufficiency rates; and

v) Monopolistic control of rice imports through quasi-state food agencies that claim purchases make up for shortfalls in domestic supply.[8]

International financial institutions (IFIs), Western donors, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, and foreign mainstream economists decry the protectionism. They, along with some domestic technocrats, prefer market-based solutions. Their basic premise is that open markets guided by private actors reacting to price movements will generate such benefits as bringing down rice prices and lessening poverty. Lower prices will result from, one, incentives for the private sector to invest in marketing system efficiency improvements and, two, the importation of higher amounts of less costly rice. Easier access to this foodstuff, market advocates assert, will advance the food security of the poor, empowering them to consume more of the cereal. More consumption in turn will augment nutritional outcomes and expand household spending on education and health. This pertains to vulnerable urban *and* rural families, since the majority of paddy growers – let alone landless laborers – remain net consumers of rice. Beyond the household level, government savings garnered from reductions in production programs can be shifted to more proven poverty alleviation measures, notably conditional or direct cash transfers.[9] Market reformers forward the general stickiness of poverty and troubling rates of chronic malnutrition among children, especially stunting, in each of these countries as tangible indicators of longstanding misguided rice policies.[10]

Activists who defend the rights and welfare of self-employed, petty commodity producers are wary of relying on traders and corporations to solve hunger and poverty. They insist that forcing staple foods to be "dependent on the vagaries of the global rice market is like putting our

[8] On the importance of disaggregating strategic development policy packages, see Haggard (1990, chapter 2).

[9] Economists do not advocate abolishing paddy cultivation but estimates of the degree of contraction warranted are wanting.

[10] Bouis and Haddad 1990; Habito 2017; Beal, Tumilowicz, Sutrisna, et al. 2018. To compare stunting figures between rice importers and exporters in the region, see Benedict, Seo, Winichagoon et al. (2020); UNICEF (2021, p. 15, figure 1, p. 15); Lee, Muhammad, Kim, et al. (2022).

children's food on the table at the mercy of vultures in a wasteland."[11] Instead, movement organizers embrace state interference. They believe squeezing the supply of cheap imports will be a boon for local smallholder livelihoods by incentivizing cultivators to plant more paddy in order to meet national demand. But like market liberals, small-scale farmer organizers too have been dismayed by what they see as wayward rice policy implementation. They cite the capture of input subsidies by larger landowning producers through patronage relations with local officials, as well as other producer supports like cheap credit, as reasons for their frustration. Others encompass disproportionate gains by local traders and millers owing to collusive behavior among them, impulsive government decisions to import over solving urgent sociopolitical problems (like land reform), and the hollowing out of local bureaucracies that are no longer capable of assisting smallholders in adapting the latest farming techniques, for example, to confront the mounting challenges that climate change poses.[12]

Undoubtedly, rice policies have huge ramifications for poverty and development. Yet if politically opposed market liberals and smallholder champions share in their dissatisfaction with these policies, this book asks: Why has protectionism endured as long as it has in Indonesia and Malaysia, and why did it last as long as it did in the Philippines? Placing this study's animating question in its proper historical perspective, this book constitutes a modest endeavor at providing plausible and persuasive answers. They begin with the Green Revolution.

Argument, Part I: Green Revolution Triumphalism

While discrete elements of these protectionist models described above are well documented, I develop a novel argument for their origins *and* for their institutionalization. Part I develops this book's first principal proposition. It contends that, with some irony, the overlapping rice policy packages, widely bemoaned as a failure, are rooted in the Green Revolution, a contingent yet momentous event in the recent history of these three Southeast Asian states. The Green Revolution was a rice production campaign that outperformed expectations, so much so that these countries' bundle of protectionist policies has been sustained for decades by the legacies of this successful project. That Indonesia, the

[11] "ADB 'plan for regional rice cartel' bared," businessmirror.com.ph, September 3, 2012 (last accessed November 15, 2016). See also Prabhakar (2002).

[12] The dichotomy is heuristically useful here. The diversity within farming advocacy is broad (Edelman and Borras 2016).

Philippines, and Malaysia each participated in the Green Revolution is a crucial and frequently overlooked commonality among them.[13] I claim that essential to the institutional formation and durability of their particular form of rice protectionism lies in the sequencing, timing, and political context out of which these policy models were fashioned. Integral to this book's diachronic argument is that each *emerged* during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and in turn each subsequently *coalesced* following these states' extraordinary feat in implementing the Green Revolution's package of land-saving cultivating technology.

Critiques of the Green Revolution have proliferated from its outset. Exorbitant costs, politicized origins as a Cold War anticommunist ploy derived by the West through which its chemical fertilizer conglomerates would profit, marginalization of local seed breeding traditions, promotion of ecologically harmful monocropping, disruption of planting schedules predicated on timeless cultural influences, and inattention paid to environmental consequences feature among the objections.[14] This study acknowledges these broadsides of critical agricultural economists, rural sociologists, anthropologists, and some historians, and wrestles with their implications. These judgments, however, cannot deny the substantial evidence state elites have deployed to celebrate the Green Revolution's achievements. Pushing back against these biting reviews by drawing on positive or nuanced assessments, I posit that the paddy-boosting drives in these three Southeast Asian states accomplished some of their core aims, especially when evaluated at national aggregate levels.[15] This success has generated a complex legacy. It helped to shape cardinal attributes of the political regimes that oversaw the Green Revolution's implementation, and how the projects' outcomes have been subsequently interpreted and wielded by a select group of state elites and others. This best explains the origins *and* institutional continuity of this particular protectionist policy model in these three rice sectors, respectively.

In the language of the historical institutionalist literature, I take the stance that the Green Revolution constitutes a critical juncture that unequivocally reshaped the development path of decades of low-cultivation capacity, along with decisive political trajectories in these

[13] Important exceptions include Barker and Herdt (1985), Hart, Turton, and White (1989), and more recently Henley (2015).

[14] A sample, concentrating on Southeast Asia (with partial exemptions): Griffin 1974; Feder 1983; Gibbons 1984; Tadem 1986; Lansing 1991; Boyce 1993; Freebairn 1995; Cullather 2010. Others are cited throughout the empirical chapters.

[15] Even if critical of community-level developments, some scholars still recognized national-level progress (Dove 1985; Scott 1985; Hart, Turton, and White 1989). For mostly subsequent and positive aggregate assessments, see sources cited in note 21.

three states. The magnitude of their outcomes in rice agriculture, triggered by the Green Revolution, is amplified when compared to the profound provisioning struggles of colonial and early independence governments. Startling Green Revolution performance constituted a transformative institutional legacy whose realization prolonged the path dependence or reproduction over time of rice sector boosterism and protectionism.[16] Put succinctly, no *successful* Green Revolution, no durable rice protectionism. Without the surges in paddy and rice, governments in these three states would have been more easily compelled by influential Western donors and IFIs to open their respective rice import markets in order to provide for national food security. For decades, Green Revolution success, even as rates of self-sufficiency in rice declined afterwards, *legitimized* intervention in rice markets.[17]

The Green Revolution

Achievement in the paddy production campaign known as the Green Revolution comprised three main parts. The steep spikes in output were unassailable (Table I.1). Increased rates in double-cropping (producing harvests twice a year) and in yield growth (cultivating more paddy per hectare) materialized on the whole through the widespread adoption of a package of new technologies.[18] The technologies' primary elements composed improved water control, fast-ripening semi-dwarf seeds – also known as modern varieties (MVs) – and a rapid rise in the use of chemical fertilizers. Signally, they precipitated production surges without a corresponding expansion in land.

Second was progress made on poverty reduction (Table I.2). Hikes in production and yield were accompanied by a raft of supportive policies – from input subsidies and cheap credit to active government procurement and rice price stabilization. As such, the incomes of millions of poor smallholders rose and in turn initiated intersectoral linkage effects. Consider the shifts created in labor supply and employment. As upticks in rice productivity necessitated less farm labor, millions migrated to cities for jobs in factories. Hiring quickened as the ready supply of rice at stable prices kept costs in check, since rice was a prime wage good. Not all who quit the paddyfields migrated permanently. Some did so

[16] On path dependence, North (1990, chapter 11); Collier and Collier (1991); Mahoney (2000); Pierson (2000).

[17] Reardon, Chen, Minten, et al. (2014, p. 106) use "spellbound" to describe the Green Revolution's hold on local policymakers.

[18] The western Indonesian island of Sumatra was host to some paddyland expansion.

Table I.1 *3-year annual average of rice production ('000 metric tons).*

	1961–63	1984–86	Change
Malaysia	725	1168	+61%
The Philippines	2540	5692	+125%
Indonesia	10,012	26,534	+165%

Source: indexmundi.com (citing United States Department of Agriculture Data).

Table I.2 *Poverty reduction.*

	Years	First year (%)	Last year (%)	Annual reduction (%)
The Philippines	1971–94	52	36	0.7
Indonesia	1970–90	58	19	2.0
Malaysia	1973–87	37	14	1.6

Source: Gerson 1998. (Some geographical within-country dimensions of these figures are addressed in the empirical chapters.)

seasonally, and others worked in trade, transportation, construction, and other businesses as local economies became more buoyant. The experience of this pro-poor growth was uneven across the three cases, although each underwent marked structural transformation. Structural transformation occurs when contributions from industrial, manufacturing, and service sectors start to outpace those from agriculture. As the urban population expands, the agricultural labor force ebbs alongside the sector's share in the gross domestic product (GDP).[19] Of our cases, Malaysia's transition was the most thorough, and Indonesia's relative change was the most pronounced (Table I.3).[20] An accumulation of evidence-based studies affirms the catalytic role played by the Green Revolution in spurring these developments.[21]

The third component of Green Revolution success was the less quantifiable political outcomes for the project's financiers, implementors, and beneficiaries. Amid acute anxieties of the Cold War, further induced by the escalation then struggle of US military involvement in Vietnam, Western governments and foundations underwrote Green Revolution-

[19] Also known as agrarian transformation, see Timmer (1988); Mellor (2017, chapter 2).
[20] With intent, tables show data closely related to the impact of the Green Revolution, not the present.
[21] Barker 1985; Booth 1988; Manning 1988; Balisacan 1995; Gerson 1998; Timmer 2005; Estudillo, Sawada, and Otsuka 2006; Koninck and Raiha 2012; Henley 2015; Taffesse and Tsakok 2019, among others.

Table I.3 *Key indicators of structural transformation.*

	% of labor in agriculture			% of agriculture in GDP			Urbanization %		
	Years	First year	Last year	Years	First year	Last year	Years	First year	Last year
The Philippines	1965–89	59.0	45.0	1965–88	30.6	23.0	1965–90	31.6	47.0
Malaysia	1965–92	59.0	22.0	1965–88	28.0	21.1	1965–90	29.9	49.8
Indonesia	1965–92	71.0	50.0	1965–88	56.0	24.0	1965–90	15.8	30.6

Sources: Booth 1992, p. 2, table 1.1; Balisacan 1998, p. 78-79, tables 1 and 2; Tradingeconomics.com; Macrotrends.net (urbanization figures). Malaysia's labor force fell more precipitously than agriculture's share in the GDP because of the country's large capital-intensive palm oil export sector.

related research and implementation. Scrambling to counter the mass appeal of ascendant revolutionary forces, they worried about the opening of a "second front" in their fight against Communism in Southeast Asia. That popular leftist movements might exploit the instability caused by festering food insecurity only heightened concerns.[22]

Green Revolution success lent stability to conservative, repressive, pro-capital, non-Communist regimes. Achievement in food-crop agriculture that also required deep penetration of local society by state personnel helped Ferdinand Marcos in 1969 to become the first Philippine president to win reelection. Some four years later, he declared Martial Law, through which he ruthlessly ruled the country for another decade and a half. In Indonesia, bountiful harvests allowed Major General Soeharto, who in 1965–66 had orchestrated a massacre of Communists and those suspected thereof, to enforce stability, particularly in the pivotal political and farming island of Java, and gain sought-after legitimacy for his young, right-wing authoritarian regime. In Malaysia, flooding party patronage networks with agricultural resources solidified the electoral support of the vital voting bloc of Malay smallholders for the United Malays National Organization (UMNO). For decades, this political party commanded a coalition that won at the polls uninterruptedly, even though contests were clouded by electoral manipulation. The resulting predictability in politics primed the country to record some of the fastest economic growth rates in Asia. Accordingly, unlike in India, where the Green Revolution unfolded in a democratic polity and thus moderately empowered rural society electorally and otherwise, a likewise occurrence did not transpire in Southeast Asia.[23]

The significance of the Green Revolution has been neglected by some leading political scientists writing on authoritarian persistence and equitable development in the region.[24] Without Green Revolution success, which also includes the financing made available by the West for ample rice imports (addressed later in this chapter), the ability of these regimes to survive would have been compromised severely. Regime leaders were starkly aware that looming food insecurity was a cause of their precarious positions. Enhanced rice provisioning in turn buttressed each regime's authority without question. In other words, inadequate rice, inadequate

[22] Brackman 1966.
[23] On India, see the excellent work of Varshney (1995) and Dasgupta (2018).
[24] Slater 2010; Kuhonta 2011. In a subsequent study, Slater makes a passing reference to the positive development effects of improved rice production in Indonesia (Slater and Wong 2022, p. 185).

power; the feeding of the security forces and the civil service by these regimes, let alone the so-called masses, was imperative. Meanwhile, in comparing Malaysia's superior equitable development record to that of Thailand, the country that experienced the Green Revolution stands to reason as a viable factor in the explanation of this difference. Because Thailand's surplus capacity depressed the need to apply the pricey new technology in comprehensive fashion, this land-abundant country, unlike Malaysia, missed out on the inclusive growth effects of this large-scale program.[25]

Production Nationalists

Central to this book's argument about the legacy of the Green Revolution was the emergence from the project of a special group of elites I term *production nationalists*. They were, and continue to be, the policy elites, ministers, bureaucrats, and field implementors attached to agriculture ministries but who are found among other departments with broad development responsibilities as well. Civil society activists, academics, journalists, and politicians have joined their ranks, alongside even presidents and prime ministers. In his 1989 autobiography, Indonesian President Soeharto (1966–98) describes receiving an award from the FAO in 1985 for the accomplishment of reaching complete self-sufficiency in rice as his most cherished honor.[26] President Marcos (1965–83) readily relished having his picture taken with Filipino rice planters to associate himself with the surges in output, and in his speeches he glorified his country's historic quest for self-sufficiency in rice. In Malaysia, agricultural budgets soared along with a deepening of state intervention in the 1970s under the premierships of Abdul Razak Hussein (1970–76) and Hussein Onn (1976–81), both of whom endeavored to elevate the status of paddy producers in society. The feat of this cultivation campaign in each case infused production nationalists with personal confidence, arguably an inflated sense of national pride, and concrete evidence of policy acuity. As a result of the Green Revolution, production nationalists have exuded what social psychologists refer to as authentic pride. Also known as achievement-

[25] Notwithstanding outstanding studies of agricultural policy and development among Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia (Siamwalla and MacIntyre 2001; Rock 2017) and Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines (Akiyama and Larson 2004), Thailand was not a Green Revolution case, as noted above. Its output has mostly increased through paddyland *expansion* (Hayami and Kikuchi 1981, p. 43; Barker and Herdt 1985, tables 4.12 and 4.13, pp. 46–47, 50; Oshima 1987, chapter 7; Walker 2012, pp. 52–53).

[26] Soeharto 1989, pp. 1–4.

oriented pride, it motivates individuals to persevere in their socially productive tasks in the face of stiff challenges.[27]

As a sociopolitical identity, the production nationalist was a new addition to these three states. It did not exist prior to the Green Revolution on account of pervasive farming underperformance; there was little to crow about regarding the rice sector. The annual yet precarious "hungry season," when supplies grew thin prior to the single main harvest, exemplified the regularity of severe provisioning difficulties. By lifting this dismal cycle, and some of its technical constraints and structures, Green Revolution implementation introduced rapid change, including the unleashing of unprecedented capabilities, rhetoric, and triumph. The pride of production nationalists has been an underappreciated sociopolitical mechanism in prolonging that project's legacy.[28] By drawing on recent theorization of the role of emotions in world politics, I conceive of pride as a useful example of an "emotional belief." An emotional belief, according to Mercer, "is where emotion constitutes and strengthens a belief and which makes possible a generalization about an actor that involves certainty beyond evidence."[29] For the production nationalists, that confirmation, even if embellished, was the shared struggles of implementing the Green Revolution, from policy formulation to the paddyfields, with surprising success. This lived experience transformed an individual-level emotion into a collective or political belief – in this instance, from the singular production nationalist to production *nationalism*.

Adding the concept of an emotional belief that emerges from real-world policy wins to the analytic toolbox of the historical institutional literature constitutes an advance of that work.[30] Not all ideas stick, some last, others do not, but most have emotional components to them. From politicians and propagandists to academics, the amount of pride a propagator invests in an idea can determine which idea outlasts another. Pride resulting from an achievement or from the acquisition of a good idea is a powerful motivating force. An emotion like pride, for example, resonates more deeply among actors than the popular notion of "social learning." In his influential study of shifts in policy paradigms, Hall investigated British technocrats who in the late 1970s and early 1980s advocated for more monetarist modes of macroeconomic regulation. Although Hall

[27] Tracy and Robins 2007; Williams and DeStefano 2008. Pride has two variants; the other is hubristic, with achievements that trigger pride more characteristically vague in nature.
[28] The importance of pride is revealed in some written sources but especially from key oral interviews I conducted; they are referred to in the empirical chapters.
[29] Mercer 2010, p. 2. [30] Sikkink 1991; Blyth 1997; Berman 2001; Schmidt 2008.

does not take note, we can presume that his policymakers would have felt considerable pride in having defeated the dominant post–Second World War (WWII), Keynesian approach.[31]

In the case of the net importers of this book, this prideful belief underpinning production nationalism has informed resistance to rice trade liberalization, defiantly thwarting the persistent efforts of reformers. This was especially so as the wonders of the Green Revolution started to fade beginning in the mid-to-late 1980s, hastened by the drawdown of Western donor support for the transformative program. From the points of view of the United States and its allies, the Rockefeller and Ford foundations, the World Bank, and other aligned organizations, having helped to avert famine in and vanquish Communism in this part of the world, they shifted aid commitments to attend to the problems plaguing nascent industrialization. As the West altered its development focus, discernible policy dissension arose. Production nationalists held their ground and favored the Green Revolution's furtherance, equating robust paddy growth with national dignity. Henceforth, the state of cultivation became inescapably politicized in the context of production nationalism. It is this environment in which the regularity of rice imports has been discursively derided as disgraceful, as a sign of development failure, associated with pride's emotional rival – shame. On the other side have stood the pro-market donors and IFIs, alongside local technocrats. In the language of institutional development, for decades they were the "losers" or challengers to the prevailing productionist-cum-protectionist paradigm.[32] Rather abruptly, they had switched from funding intervention during the Green Revolution to deriding it. By trumpeting liberalization, they hoped in time it would normalize rice imports. This policy confrontation has exhibited remarkable staying power.

Conventional Explanations: Culture, Agricultural Political Economy, Vested Interests

I view the role of pride in the legacy of policy continuity predicated on Green Revolution success as an instructive complement to the standard explanations of protectionism in food-crop agriculture. My contribution does not displace these other theories but fills gaps where they fall short. Three conventional arguments stand out. The first is a cultural frame. Applicable to other staples and regions beyond rice in Southeast Asia, it is frequently drawn upon, for example, in studies of maize politics in

[31] Hall 1986, esp. pp. 275–76; Hall 1993.
[32] On winners and losers in institutional development, see Thelen (2004, p. 32).

Mexico.[33] As for rice, in a major 2012 study by the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the FAO, its authors speculate that in the minds of Asians, this crop holds a special place; it helps to shape Asian identities and acts as a glue that binds society together. Thus, expecting rice policy to be guided by cost-benefit analysis or efficient policies is unrealistic.[34] A second alternative, agricultural political economy (APE), is a composite of related arguments. I present three in particular. An anti-trade bias proposition underlines that poorer states tax export crops because duties are administratively easier to collect at a small number of ports than from millions of petty commodity producers; the resulting revenue – exaggerated by the low prices governments pay their own producers – is diverted to urban-based industries on the whole.[35] At the same time, import competing crops, such as foreign rice, are levied to protect the incomes of poor producers who comprise the majority of the population.[36] A second proposition, referred to as the development paradox, maintains that with prosperity the percentage of the labor force employed in agriculture in a country declines. Paradoxically, as the economic fortunes of these laborers wanes, their political clout waxes because, being fewer in number, their organizing grows in strength. Their associations' lobbying efforts gain in effectiveness, since governments are more willing to heed their demands for support with the fewer number of recipients easing the financial burden of redistribution.[37] A third component of APE homes in on institutional matrices and constitutional mandates of a given country. More specifically, it concerns how different sets of electoral rules and political party systems affect outcomes. In a system with majoritarian single-member districts, for instance, politicians might target agricultural-based voters in that system's characteristically smaller districts. In proportional representation systems with their larger districts, urban voters might take precedence.[38]

A vested interests vantage point constitutes a third conventional argument for protectionism in food-crop agriculture.[39] Also rooted in a political economy tradition, it insists that economic rents – understood as directly unproductive gains and/or abnormal profits – corruption, and other distortions result from overbearing state intervention. Misallocated

[33] Fitting 2006; Simmons 2016, esp. chapter 4; Gálvez 2018.
[34] Alavi, Htenas, Kopicki, *et al.* 2012, p. 34.
[35] On urban bias, see Lipton (1977); Krueger, Schiff, and Vales (1988); Varshney (1993).
[36] Swinnen 2018, chapter 5. [37] Krueger, Schiff, and Vales 1988; Hayami 2007.
[38] Bates and Block 2010; Rausser and Roland 2010.
[39] Olson 1985; Balisacan and Roumasset 1987; Rashid, Gulati, and Cummings 2008; Anderson 2010; Pinstrup-Andersen and Watson 2011, pp. 34–35.

subsidies and import monopoly-holders that profit handsomely from the margins between buying prices abroad and selling prices at home lead to windfall revenues that are concentrated in a few hands. Facilitated by dense patronage networks, bosses then distribute these resources to other cronies and such clients as members of coalitional allies, traders' associations, regional political elites and bureaucrats, and even wealthier surplus-producing planters. The lucrativeness of this distribution creates the interlocking feedback effects that reproduce the system over time, despite its discriminately impoverishing effects on millions of food-insecure families by artificially raising rice prices. While rent-seeking compels a small number of elites to overcome collective action problems and cooperate in order to seize substantial material reward, the majority of the urban and rural poor are less capable of pressing for policy changes in their favor because of the difficulties they experience in organizing.

Each camp has merit. An extensive literature supports the thick cultural attachments to rice that Southeast Asians display.[40] It underscores the vitality of traditional beliefs in the magical and symbolic properties of rice and the foodstuff's tight association with spirits that protect harvests and ensure their bounty. These perspectives once influenced the use of finger or palm knives with which agriculturalists predominately had cut paddy stalks so as not to frighten rice deities.[41] In addition, the MVs that galvanized the Green Revolution were known colloquially as "miracle seeds," invoking the conviction in the cereal's sacred qualities. Even as mechanization has nearly conquered Southeast Asia's paddyfields, sweeping cultural understandings of the grain continue to echo. A Philippine sociologist recently editorialized: "I know of no other commodity that carries the same emotional force that rice commands in our culture." Publications in Indonesia with such titles as *Rice's Charisma* (*Kharisma Beras*) are commonplace, and research in Malaysia fostering the country's rice culture as unique endures.[42]

A broad swath of state and other elites, production nationalists among them, still endorses analogously romantic views of rice as an object pregnant with rich cultural attributes, which gives the cultural standpoint some analytical traction since these actors do have currency in policy-making. For these elites, the ideas and ideals embedded in the crop exude the agrarian values of authenticity, indigenousness, and purity,

[40] See the many studies in Hamilton (2003).
[41] Examples for the Philippines: Arens 1956; Scott 1994, pp. 35–39; Aguilar 2013; Malaysia: Skeat 1900; Shaw 1911; Sather 1980; Sevea 2019; Indonesia: Jong 1965; Collier, Wiradi, and Soentoros 1973; Lansing 1991; Wessing 2006.
[42] David 2023; Sastraatmadja 2007; Siti Radhiah and Siti Nazirah 2018.

all of which have been sullied by the steady onslaught of modern lifestyles and capitalist development. They tout an ideology of agrarianism as an essence of the social structure, order, and culture of the society they imagine once existed, and as a conservative anchor providing stability amid a relentlessly changing world and an uncertain future.[43]

Regarding APE, governing parties have consistently adopted protectionist policies, from input subsidies to controlling imports, that they purport arise from constituent preferences. The association among electoral competition, institutions, and interventionist rice policies probably fits Malaysia best. There, UMNO, once the ruling party, vigorously manipulated electoral districts and rules, such as assigning sparse rural districts more electoral weight than urban counterparts, to win elections by concentrating on well-subsidized Malay agricultural voters.[44] Indonesian and Philippine politicians have also vied for important rural votes by offering money to individuals and club goods to communities, including farming equipment.[45]

Lastly, rent-seeking behavior, corruption, and vested interests have long pervaded monopolized rice imports by quasi-state agencies, otherwise known as parastatal organizations, and state-led cultivation programs. This book will detail across time and space scandals of millions of dollars arising from excessive or over-priced imports and the divergence of tons of subsidized fertilizer from intended uses as telling illustrations.

Despite their utility, these explanations have limitations. They tend to be an axiomatic catch-all in general and undersell the magnitude of the Green Revolution and its legacy in particular. Take their ahistorical qualities. Each cause is proposed without clear origins. In contrast, pride, as an emotional belief, emerged from the tangible historical experience of the Green Revolution; as such, we can with some confidence date its provenance. Essentialism, competitive elections, and predatory rent-seeking lack time-contextual features that relate directly to the Green Revolution. Nor do they handle an inherent trait of the Green Revolution well, that of change. At the time, some scholars cited the suffocating conservative culture of the Southeast Asian paddy farmer as to why the colossal scheme was doomed to fail.[46] Regarding institutional

[43] Bray calls them "rice essentialists" (2014). Likewise beliefs have gripped societies around the world throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries across regime types and ideologies (Brass 2000).
[44] Crouch 1996. [45] Aspinall, Weiss, Hicken, et al. 2022.
[46] Arromdee 1969; Fryer 1971, pp. 256–65.

arrangements, this argument is better suited for post-Green Revolution democratic elections that might facilitate the sustaining of pressures for protectionism. Yet electoral dynamics are less equipped for analyzing the *origins* of these policy packages. They cannot account for why authoritarian governments spent inordinate public resources on rural citizens in the absence of genuinely competitive elections or effective avenues for lobbying.[47] During the 1970s, the competitiveness of elections in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines was dulled amid authoritarian onset, even as spending on food-crop agriculture continued apace. Lastly, the risks behind the Green Revolution were so weighty for its policymakers, field implementors, and especially cultivators that only in hindsight could one defend that it was plainly in their interests to commit unprecedented amounts of political and financial resources to unproven technology (outside tightly controlled conditions). Instead, uncertainty reigned over the untested production programs. Research across disciplines has established that in periods of sociopolitical turbulence or unpredictability, preference formation becomes appreciably blurred and unsteady.[48]

In addition to their ahistorical facets, these alternatives tend to view their subjects of scrutiny through a monolithic lens. Rice essentialism, for example, excludes the local societies within these countries whose diets historically have not been reliant on rice, but instead to varying extents have subsisted on corn, cassava, and other root crops.[49] Today, those Filipinos, Indonesians, and Malaysians who prefer cheaper rice regardless of origin also undermine this frame of reference.

With few tools to address the variety of class positions of rural voters, APE assumes a bloc of farmer support for protectionism.[50] Yet while elevated domestic rice prices as a result of intervention might favor larger growers who market their surpluses, the majority of agricultural workers and smallholders remain net consumers of rice, and they might, if

[47] Olper (2007) and Thomson (2019) suggest that the presence of landowning elites might force a (right-wing) dictator to do so. This theory might apply to the Philippine case but not Malaysia and Indonesia. Nor does it explain the drastic change in spending under the Green Revolution in the Philippines, or that Marcos politically targeted many of those landlords. In the post-1969 period, with its electoral manipulation and civil liberty restrictions, Malaysia was variously categorized as a semi-democracy or soft authoritarian state (Crouch 1996, chapter 1).

[48] North 1990, pp. 18–19, 24; Ariely 2008; Hanson 2010, xiii–xxvi; Lichtenstein and Slovic 2012.

[49] Fox 1977; Spencer 1997; Eng 1998; Ellen 2020.

[50] Even though differentiation has long been a topic in agrarian studies (Edelman and Borras 2016, chapter 2).

given the choice, prefer lower rice prices. APE, moreover, holds a problematic default position that only voter preference – even if narrowly conceived – prevents rational political actors from embracing open markets. With its overly rational, materialist orientation, APE overlooks the possibility that many state elites themselves privilege protectionism in the first order. While material motivations cannot be denied, neither can pride, rice romanticizing, distrust of the reliability of the world market, and genuine belief that enlightened intervention best achieves balanced food security for rural and urban sectors. This latter stance is rendered only possible based on the experience and legacy of Green Revolution success.

Finally, for the vested-interests assertion, discriminating among competing factions becomes a knotty proposition. This hypothesis offers that agriculture ministerial interests would lobby for large budget allocations for rice-boosting campaigns. If realized, by the same token they would impinge on the interests of the parastatals that hold monopoly import permits. But would not the latter scramble to find ways to keep the import faucet flowing? By what means is this clash of interests adjudicated? Would not the potency of presidents, prime ministers, and heads of leading political parties also need to be regarded? These questions are addressed in Part II of *Rice Politics in Southeast Asia.*

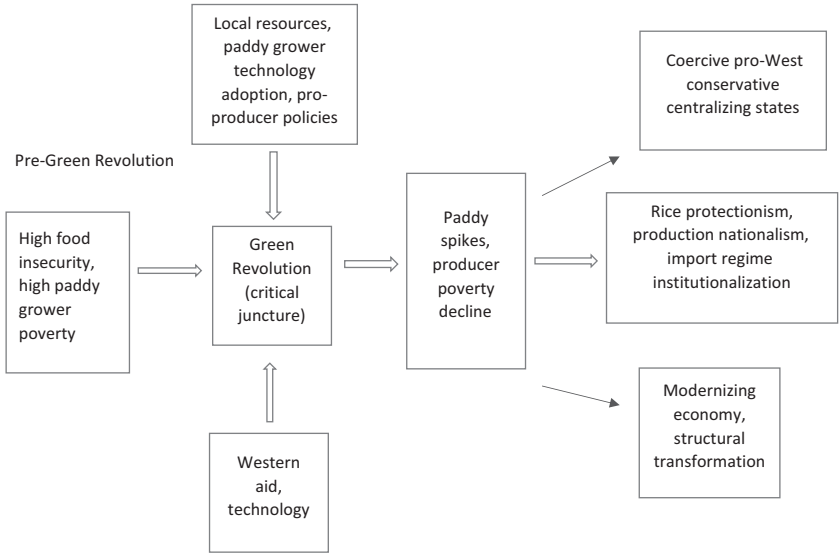

Local resources, paddy grower technology adoption, pro-producer policies
Pre-Green Revolution
High food insecurity, high paddy grower poverty
Green Revolution (critical juncture)
Paddy spikes, producer poverty decline
Coercive pro-West conservative centralizing states
Rice protectionism, production nationalism, import regime institutionalization
Modernizing economy, structural transformation
Western aid, technology

Figure I.1 The Argument, Part I.

The Argument, Part II: Post-Green Revolution Rice Import Regimes

Part II of this book centers on the multifaceted approach of production nationalists to sustain interest and material resources in rice cultivation as the prowess of the Green Revolution faded. During this period, rates in rice self-sufficiency declined as the aura of the "miracle seed" revolution diminished – aid shifted, economies modernized, societies urbanized, and agricultural labor aged. Paraphrasing Weber, the magic routinized. Production nationalism not only came under mounting pressure by changing structural conditions and by the lurch of the IFIs toward the neoliberal dictates of liberalization (of rice imports) and contraction (of public spending, including that on production programs). Production nationalism was also confronted by competing *domestic* coalitions – in this case, parastatal managers and their hangers-on who sought economic rents through the regular importing of sizable quantities of rice.

In this connection, a second main argument of this book grows from a contradiction that lies at the core of the post-Green Revolution protectionist policy menu of the net importers adumbrated above. On the one hand, production nationalists demand budget increases to buoy domestic cultivation that ostensibly would encroach upon importing interests. On the other hand, parastatals prefer large imports. They might be motivated by the prospect of reducing poverty if their actions lead to lower domestic prices, but they are also driven by opportunities to capture economic rents that result from the import process. Kickbacks from select transport companies are lucrative sources, yet so is the wide marketing margins between buying costs abroad and home selling prices. The national case studies of Part II offer evidence as to how these parastatals became integral to what this book dubs *rice import regimes*, how these agencies have withstood withering attacks, and why the dissension between the competing interests depicted above may be less sharp than presumed. To demonstrate why, we must link this book's first argument about contending with the legacy of Green Revolution success to its second part, the institutionalization of the monopoly-holding parastatals – or in other words, the consolidation of a rice import regime.[51] I attempt to remedy this apparent paradox in the pages that follow.

Some Malaysian, Filipino, and Indonesian state elites distrust the world market for not having exportable rice surpluses available at all

[51] On consolidation, Haggard and Kaufman (1992, pp. 6–7) write: "not only that policies have persisted over time, but that they have been institutionalized within the policy system."

times at reasonable prices. After all, this is a thinly traded market where only 8–11 percent of the total rice produced is exchanged internationally, rendering it more susceptible to wide price swings than other commodities, notably wheat.[52] These same actors might also avail of the monopoly rents that their parastatals produce. Nevertheless, often overlooked in the Green Revolution literature were the pivotal contributions of state-controlled rice imports to that large-scale project's realization. This assessment sets these countries' parastatals apart, for example, from counterparts in sub-Saharan Africa. In both regions, colonial officials were behind the founding of agricultural marketing boards. But lackluster, state-led food production programs in independent sub-Saharan Africa, as Bates recounts in his landmark study,[53] contrast pointedly with Southeast Asia's experience.

Production nationalists enjoy extolling their exploits with good reason.[54] Uncertainty and conflict, however, permeated the Green Revolution. Its plentiful harvests were neither instant nor linear. Missteps and missed targets were inescapable. They were attributable to coordination problems among multiscalar governments across vast spaces, corruption, hubristic policymaking, dry weather, or pest outbreaks exacerbated by monocropping. Rice imports, many of which were financed with Western aid, cushioned the potential political fallout from production shortages across the project's lifetime. Improvements in rice provisioning by either means buttressed the staying power of these increasingly authoritarian regimes.

Exerting tighter control over rice proved indispensable. Enhanced domestic procurement by the parastatals helped to ascertain stable floor prices for producers, yet direct management of imports was as consequential. Stronger, more coercive governments partially sidelined local ethnic Chinese merchants by granting import monopolies to food parastatals – in Malaysia the National Paddy and Rice Authority or the LPN; in the Philippines the National Grains Authority (NGA), later succeeded by the National Food Authority (NFA); and in Indonesia the State Logistics Board or Bulog.[55] Fundamentally, the monopoly license that was granted to each of these entities during the Green Revolution has

[52] Winders 2017, chapter 1. [53] Bates 1981.

[54] A representative sample: on Indonesia – Soeharto 1989, pp. 1–4, 333–41; Arifin 1994, 1997; the Philippines – SONA 1981; "Masagana 99 Fulfills Dreams to Make Country Self-sufficient in Rice," 1983; Malaysia – Abdul Rahman and Ani 1971; Sanusi 1990; and regionally, a former production nationalist champion, ADB 2020, esp. chapter 4.

[55] In Malay, LPN is short for Lembaga Padi dan Beras Negara. In Indonesian, Bulog is short for Badan Urusan Logistik. These parastatals did not fully sideline domestic market transactions (Chapter 2).

been the crucial mechanism in the consolidation of each of these import regimes. Without it, the protectionist rice policy model described above would not have institutionalized.

With monopoly permits in hand, the parastatals swiftly learned what generations of ethnic Chinese traders had known intimately: Given the disparity between sale prices in mainland Southeast Asia as well as in Hong Kong and purchase prices at home, importing the cereal was fantastically profitable. This was true of legal transactions, and even more so considering the prevalence of malfeasance and corruption ingrained in the trade. Over time, the interests of these agencies began to take root, and their patronage networks expanded.

Although this observation gives credence to an interest-based argument, on its own this explanation cannot address how over time networks assumed different forms as they intersected with national fields of economic and political power. Showing these decisive distinctions across cases requires embedding patronage networks in broader patterns of national political economy. Accordingly, this book offers comparative insights on the rice-importing parastatals and scrutinizes their post-Green Revolution webs of relationships to the import regimes in which they have been situated. Their networked patronage structures have been fashioned by the character of their respective states, party systems, political competition, and key demographic and geographic features. Conceptually, I consider import regimes to be more than a conventional understanding of comprising principles and formal rules that guide purchases or make them efficient by coordinating actions and standardizing expectations.[56] Organized around a specific commodity, import regimes are equally a constellation of dynamic networks or coalitions of salient domestic and international actors. They are constitutive of formal and informal institutions, containing countervailing public and private objectives conditioned by historical experience. I present brief national examples in turn.

In Indonesia under President Soeharto's New Order regime (1966–98), rice imports were formally under the monopolistic control of Bulog. Its managers, along with crony capitalists of President Soeharto, arranged the importations and earned enormous economic rents in return. Firm control over the business epitomized the centralization of corruption and patronage that characterized the regime's governance.[57] When a destabilizing financial crisis and subsequent

[56] Krasner defines regimes as "principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given-issue area" (1982, p. 185). The concept can be used for domestic purposes (Aspinall, Weiss, Hicken, et al. 2022).

[57] MacIntyre 1999; McLeod 2000.

democratization movement swept Soeharto from power in 1998, the rent-seeking interests around rice imports evolved, although organizationally Bulog survived the transition. As elections in democratic Indonesia became an invaluable means to determine access to government resources and progressively more expensive in which to compete, major political party players gained hold of some of the subcontracting roles once controlled by the Chinese conglomerates. Funds were thereby channeled to a cartel of party elites, appreciable portions of which were deployed to finance campaign war-chests.

Weaker than their counterparts in Indonesia, Philippine parties have been incidental actors in their country's rice import regime.[58] There, economic rents have been distributed along a more individualized yet networked pattern among NFA leadership, presidents, palace insiders, congressional allies, and further down, trader associations, town politicians, local church groups, and others. Given the import regime's more personalized orientation, and the paucity of systematic monitoring mechanisms or sanctions, rice import scandals have gained substantial proportions. At the same time, the promotion of paddy-producing programs by multiple administrations has been relentless; as this Introduction has stressed and further expounds upon below, these two attributes are as much complementary as they are conflicting.

Malaysia's monopoly importer, the LPN, was a bureaucratic organization analogous in structure to the NFA and Bulog, even though its remit covered only paddy and rice. When the then prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad, in the early 1990s started privatizing state-owned enterprises, he included the LPN. Shares of the new agency, renamed Bernas, were traded on the country's stock exchange.[59] While monopoly rents were ostensibly transferred from the state to private hands, ownership and management of Bernas indicated that interests close to UMNO retained control over the more profit-oriented company. The intent was to accumulate capital in the hands of Malay elites, especially for UMNO and Bernas managers, and to a lesser extent Malay rice millers and farmers. In all, this rice import regime took the form of an ethnically hued corporate structure, conforming to dominant political-economic interests in contemporary Malaysia.

[58] On the country's fluid party system, see Ufen (2008) and Hicken (2015), and on its malleable rent-seeking and corruption networks, see Hutchcroft (1997, esp. p. 647).

[59] Bernas is derived from Padiberas Nasional Berhad. Privatization did not constitute an example of institutional change because the formal rules, such as the entity's social service obligations and possession of the import permit, were largely a continuation. North argues that changes in rules amount to institutional change, not organizational transformation (1990, pp. 4, 7).

In essence, the shared disdain for liberalization among production nationalists *and* importing interests has mitigated the tension between the two, for each camp has benefited materially from protectionism. Consider some estimates. Immediately prior to the 2019 liberalization in the Philippines, these three states spent approximately US$1.7 billion on rice imports in an average year.[60] Add to this figure the 25 percent or so of agricultural budgets in the three countries that are devoted to the rice sector, and we arrive at a loose estimation north of US$6 billion that is to various extents available *per year* for "intervention."[61] With enticing opportunities that lucrative rents present, corruption and rent-seeking behavior inextricably inform the protectionist policies on agriculture in general and on rice in particular. They are the straws that stir the drink, so to speak.

But there is more to apprehending how importing interests thrive amid successive paddy boosting campaigns. Estimating the enormous sums involved is one step. Another is underscoring, under protectionism, the implausibility of objectively determining the size of rice imports needed to align supply with demand. Unfortunately, the literature on food security assumes a high degree of objectivity; I construe this viewpoint as functionalist. Functionalism accords imports with the function of making up for shortfalls in production.[62] This is because of a presumption of a straightforward relationship between production and imports: As one goes up, the other comes down, or vice versa. Functionalism trusts in the close inverse correspondence between import volumes and production (or total needs). A bumper harvest results in fewer imports, a poor harvest leads to more imports, and so on.[63]

I treat rice imports differently. This book marshals ample evidence that casts considerable doubt on the reliability of this functional relationship. Analytically, the concept of a rice import regime embodies a nonfunctional awareness of politics.[64] More specifically, it assists in loosening the

[60] This assumes the price of rice at US$400 per metric ton, a rough prepandemic average from 2014 to 2019 (https://fred.stlouisfed.org) and about five million metric tons on average for the three importers. (0.6 million metric tons for Malaysia, 3.0 for Indonesia, and 1.4 for the Philippines per year.)

[61] Based on author's calculations and estimates.

[62] For a critique of functionalism in political science, see Sartori (1970); more recently, Hall (2003, esp. pp. 378–79).

[63] Conway 1998, chapter 2; Pinstrup-Andersen and Watson 2011, esp. p. 7, figure 1.1; Tsakok 2011; Caballero-Anthony, Teng, Shrestha, et al. 2015; Hoang and Meyers 2015; Rock 2017, chapter 5; Swinnen 2018. Amelina (2004) is an exception.

[64] In describing nonfunctionalism, Olson gives the following example: "… the leader who is making a living out of an organization may keep it alive even after its original purpose has disappeared; an organization set up to represent the drivers of horses, for example, will take on the task of representing drivers of trucks … ." (1982, p. 40).

link between harvest output and import volumes. In the study of institutional reproduction and innovation, a rice import regime adds value by injecting ambiguity and "a great deal of 'play' in the interpreted meaning of particular rules or the way the rules are instantiated in practice."[65] For decades, imports in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia have been exploited, or abundantly "played" with, extending beyond their purported and publicly stated purpose.

A vital mechanism in this regard, and consistent with the entrenched interests argument, is systematic data massaging. The domestic data used to determine the timing and size of rice imports has been notoriously unreliable. On the production side, field agents report inflated paddy estimates to satisfy the unrealistic expectations of local superiors, who in turn pass these numbers to provincial and national officials with their own set of ambitious targets. The data on total acreage devoted to paddy cultivation are often also inflated, rendering them equally suspect. While both stratagems swell harvest numbers that might advantage production nationalists, data manipulation occurs among importing interests as well. One popular method is reliance on pliable per capita consumption figures. Based on questionable survey data, these figures fluctuate widely from year to year and from agency to agency. The higher the estimate of per capita consumption, the more beneficial for importers since more supply is apparently warranted. Meanwhile, as sizable rice imports draw the reproach of agriculture ministries, the latter typically publicize lower consumption estimates, which supposedly indicate that less supply is required.[66]

As this monograph also documents, over-priced rice imports have been used to pay the operational expenses of the importing entities – from covering the salaries of a bloated staff to servicing debt; at other times, proceeds are simply distributed among patronage networks. Excessive imports serve similar roles. Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia each have stockpile mandates, and these reserves are closed to public scrutiny. The persistent need to top up inventory provides convenient cover regardless of the condition of national harvests. It is in this context that the frequency of reports of rice rotting in government warehouses must be placed. Furthermore, excessive rice imports are capable of suppressing prices as elections near to curry favor with urban

[65] Mahoney and Thelen 2010, p. 11.

[66] The study of economic statistical manipulation for political gain in China has gained prominence (Holtz 2014; Wallace 2022). I do recognize that data collection on food security and nutrition worldwide is often unintentionally unreliable (Pinstrup-Andersen and Watson 2011, pp. 93–94).

voters. Or the converse can occur. In Indonesia, incumbents have been known to curb rice imports as a populist ploy to appear as if they are defending the interests of millions of small farm cultivators.

Similar to the food security literature, a vested interests framework also implies that imports serve a function: These purchases feed the distribution of rents and patronage among a network of elites and clients. This conclusion is not wrong, nor is it fully satisfying. It fares poorly in the face of periodic *decreases* in rice imports. If entrenched import interests were predominant, we would expect a steady upward trajectory in annual rice imports. Yet diachronic import data display marked variability year on year. Put simply, they go up *and* down.

I do not deny that functionalism can prevail in rice import decision-making. Input based on public ethics and the weather's effect on harvests cannot be easily dismissed. Yet only considering morality or weather conditions blinds us to the demonstrably variable patterns described above that are better studied from an unforgivingly political power or nonfunctional approach.[67] This variability contains its own unpredictability, like weather, that mostly stems from the rigors of political life – in this regard the interceding of powerful actors, none more than the preferences of a sitting president or prime minister. Their decision-making prowess can overwhelm the restraints imposed by the private interests of rice import actors and those of production nationalists. As forceful determinants, these autonomous interests can act as friend or foe to a rice import regime *and* production nationalism.

In Indonesia, post-Soeharto presidents have curtailed imports to illustrate their populist bona fides of defending the Indonesian rice grower. Philippine presidents have done likewise, but with different motivations – to burnish their clean governance credentials to distinguish themselves from the intolerably corrupt use of rice imports by a preceding government. When the Malaysian government unexpectedly raises farmgate prices for political purposes, it shrinks Bernas's profit margins. In short, the functionalism of the literature on food security and on vested interests is too tidy, too parsimonious. These research strands oversimplify the ways in which the size, frequency, and timing of imports are determined, as well as who does the purchasing. Decisions to import a sensitive staple are far messier and multidimensional. They involve keenly politicized bargaining, further obscured by rival interests spinning competing narratives based on spurious data. They implicate the intersection of institutional constraints, embedded interests, emotional

[67] Gourevitch 2013.

beliefs, and executive worry for consequences of policies for electoral competition, food security, stability, development, all informed by historical precedence and legacies. A historically grounded, nonfunctionalist approach that takes granular domestic political processes seriously by placing rice import decision-making in expansive fields of power better captures the tactical push and pull of the politics of rice in these three Southeast Asian states.[68]

Studies of Southeast Asia

This book leverages the comparative historical legacy of exceptional sectoral performance and the structures in which emotional-ideational factors (pride in Green Revolution performance), entrenched material interests (rent-seeking), and institutional power (executive preferences in the face of stiff political competition) operate. In this way, this study contributes to the rich political economy tradition of sectoral analysis in Southeast Asia. Book-length treatment of banking, telecommunications, manufacturing, agrobusiness, forestry, and mining number among the outstanding examples that compose this body of work.[69] By privileging the import sector, my study distinguishes itself in part from this impressive literature that understandably favors the export sector. Conventional notion holds that export growth attendant with international market integration has delivered the region's rapid rates of economic expansion.

But with the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020 and Russia's 2022 brutal invasion of Ukraine, both of which have caused disruptions to global supply chains and have contributed to recent inflationary pressures, concerns over food security and the drift toward economic nationalism, neo-mercantilism, and protectionism have been acute. Neither is this anxiety nor these shifts in policy paradigms new. This book exhibits that for decades prior to today's global food crises, state leaders have grappled with the ramifications of their positions or participation in the global food economy (see this Introduction's epigraph).

State leaders have puzzled over balancing localism and globalization, protectionism and liberalization, urban and rural interests, with decisions

[68] Although they adopt a critical stance, classic and contemporary variants of food regime theory (Friedman and McMichael 1989; Pritchard, Dixon, Hull, et al. 2016) lack the tools to unpack adequately the state and its constituent interests and institutions.

[69] Banking: Hutchcroft 1998; Hamilton-Hart, 2002; Walter 2008; telecommunications: Niyomsilpa 2000; Salazar 2007; manufacturing: Arrif and Hill 1985; Bowie 1991; Doner 1991; Suphat 1992; Mackay 2006; Goldthrope 2015; agrobusiness: Hawes 1987; Doner 2009, chapter 5; Varkkey 2018; Warburton 2023; forestry: Dauvergne 1997; Ross 2001; mining: Leith 2002; Holdan and Jacobson 2012; Welker 2014.

having far-reaching implications for development and resource distribution. Two illustrious cases from modern history ended in opposing directions. The repeal of the Corn Laws in England, which had taxed imported grain, in the mid-nineteenth century privileged the coalition of manufacturing owners and urban workers over the landed elite to usher in a lengthy period of freer trade. In contrast, following rice riots in 1918, Japan instituted tariffs on imports to protect its smallholders (although it allowed tariff-free rice from its colonies in Taiwan and Korea to dampen rice price inflation).[70] Examples in either direction can be multiplied indefinitely.

Beyond sectoral studies, this book draws inspiration from superlative comparative research monographs that use Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines as cases, typically among others. This work appears in two varieties – one that stresses differences to shed light on variation and another that emphasizes similarities to foreground the coherence of a pattern. In his exploration of counterrevolutionary politics and authoritarian durability, Slater categorizes Malaysia as an example of party domination, the Philippines as a case of fragmentation, and Indonesia an instance of militarization. MacIntyre places the three along a continuum of the dispersal of decision-making power to explain divergent government responses to the 1997–98 Asian Financial Crisis. Aspinall and colleagues devise a distinctive model of electoral mobilization for the three countries.[71] At the same time, Hamilton-Hart sheds light on why diplomats and foreign policy elites in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines hold the United States in high esteem, despite the former hegemon's injurious behavior in the region. Ross adopts a convergence framework for his dissection of rent-seeking and timber politics. So too do Bowie and Unger in their inquiry into the politics of economic liberalization and Rodan and Hughes in their investigation of governance and accountability.[72] This book lines up with the latter camp, save for an important distinction that has been noted above and is further addressed below – partial liberalization of rice imports in the case of the Philippines.

Overview of the Book

Rice Politics in Southeast Asia is predicated on domestic and foreign press reports, government studies, publications, and data, secondary sources, and archival research. Via research trips of varying length from 2014 to

[70] K. Anderson 1983; Williamson 1990. I return to the case of Japan in the Conclusion.
[71] MacIntyre 2002; Slater 2010; Aspinall, Weiss, Hicken *et al.* 2022.
[72] Bowie and Unger 1997; Ross 2001; Hamilton-Hart 2002; Rodan and Hughes 2014.

2024 (interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic), I conducted dozens of interviews in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and occasionally in Singapore, with former and current government officials at national and local levels; I also held illuminating discussions with agriculturalists, academics, politicians, journalists, activists, millers, rice traders, and other businessmen. Using process-tracing within cases and a small-N structured comparison across cases, I build the inductive arguments of this book over five empirical chapters within a framework of narrative-based comparative historical analysis.[73]

This book has two sections. Chapters 1 and 2 of Part I, entitled "Preconditions and Revolutionary Change," contain material from each national case and are arranged chronologically, paying causal sequencing particular heed. Chapter 1 surveys the pre-Green Revolution period. Starting in roughly the late nineteenth century, it substantiates the long politicization of rice. Persistent yet underwhelming efforts of colonial and early independence governments to intervene in foreign and local markets to provide adequate levels of this grain and to spark innovation in cultivation predominate this period. This is in contrast to the epochal period of the Green Revolution that is explored in Chapter 2, the book's most consequential chapter. It lays the empirical foundation for the study's arguments.

Part II, entitled "Post-Green Revolution Rice Import Regimes," unlike Part I, contains chapters of discrete national case studies. Material in Chapters 3 through 5 is also organized chronologically, beginning in the mid-to-late 1980s with the immediate post-Green Revolution period. These chapters cumulatively uncover escalating tensions between the single-minded government pursuit of rice production and changing preferences of Western donors; the period was marked by more complex policy environments precisely as a result of the triumph of the cultivation campaigns. Updated until the early 2020s, these narratives are also structured around successive executive administrations and their evolving relationships with their country's rice parastatals. This is not only done to highlight how these dynamics underpin the political economy of rice imports, but also because, in contrast with the authoritarian era of the Green Revolution, the drumbeat of turnover in executive power in the subsequent democratic period is too glaring to ignore.

[73] Skocpol and Somers 1980; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003; Goodin and Tilly 2006; Collier 2011; Slater and Ziblatt 2013; Ricks and Liu 2018. I try to navigate tensions between within-case and most-similar cross-case causal analysis; the former favors variation over time, the latter representation of a broader population (Gerring 2006, esp. pp. 726–28).

Borrowing from Skowronek's magisterial study of presidential power in the US, these chapters chart how executives have striven to bend the rice import regime to her advantage, even if she is structurally constrained by existing performative, institutional, and ideological configurations, particularly in relation to her immediate predecessor. In response, to varying degrees of success, executives have endeavored to carve out a sphere of autonomy by using constitutional and extra-constitutional norms, rules, and resources to propel allies and undercut oppositional groups.[74]

Accordingly, Chapters 3 through 5 focus on the decades-long interplay among Green Revolution production legacies, rice import regimes, liberalizing pressures, and executive preferences. Chapter 3 chronicles the durability of Malaysia's Bernas amid swaying fortunes and fierce political-economic competition, and Chapter 4 does likewise for Indonesia's Bulog. Chapter 5 unfolds in a similar fashion for the Philippines's NFA, that is, until the steady decades-long march of post-Green Revolution protectionism was finally disrupted under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte. In late 2018, his administration stunningly announced its intent to liberalize rice imports, with Congress passing the relevant legislation in the subsequent year. (The application of the tariff schedule signaled that liberalization was partial.) Although a bout of inflation prompted the decision to pursue dramatic reform, this chapter analyzes the move's short-term effects and how they have hamstrung Duterte's successor. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has balked at rolling back liberalization, in spite of threats made on the campaign trail, owing to the lower rice prices it has brought in a period of high inflation.

I end Chapter 5 by exploring Duterte's surprising trade reform in comparative historical perspective. I argue that when compared with the experiences of Malaysia and Indonesia, the Philippines was the most likely case to upend the institutionalized rice protectionist model, if even doing so was more contingent than inevitable.[75] The analysis surveys external pressure emanating from IFIs and Western donors as well as a range of domestic factors – from the institutional strength of executive power and of party systems to the roles of ethnicity and of technocracy in policymaking. In the case of the Philippines, these variables combined to enable Duterte to pursue difficult reform successfully but have impeded executive counterparts in Indonesia and Malaysia from following suit.

[74] Skowronek 1993. Thompson (2014) applies a version of this mode of analysis to Philippine presidencies. A focus on the top echelon of leadership in the executive branch has long been utilized in comparative political economy (Bates 1981; Haggard 1990; Pepinsky 2009).

[75] On most likely cases, see Eckstein (1975).

The Conclusion fulfils three tasks. First, in it I restate the book's main arguments, drawing out some larger implications of the study. Second, I briefly explore two other more prosperous rice-growing societies in Asia, Japan and South Korea, to show how this book's arguments can extend beyond its three primary cases. Finally, I close by pondering the rice industry's future viability in Southeast Asia's net importers.

Part I

Preconditions and Revolutionary Change

Figure I.2 Panicles of a rice plant.

1 Predicaments of the Pre-Green Revolution Period

> In Antiquity dependence on imported grains, whenever it became a constant phenomenon, always led to state intervention and hence institutional and policies consequences of fundamental importance, since private commerce was not considered adequate to ensure its provision.
>
> Max Weber, *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations* (1988 [1909])

> Many and varied forces are at work tending to alter the rice economy of Monsoon Asia. All of them are characteristically slow moving …
>
> Vernon Wickizer and Merrill Bennett, *The Rice Economy of Monsoon Asia* (1941)

Because this book's argument centers on the underrated importance of rice politics and policies for the drastic political-economic changes seen in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia over the mid-1960s and 1970s, we must establish the striking similarities among these three cases preceding the critical Green Revolution period. This chapter, which extends from the early 1900s to the mid-1960s, places emphasis on the great struggles of provisioning rice in adequate quantities, as well as the crop's long politicization. There were a number of factors behind the poor performance of rice provision. These included rampant malnutrition and poverty among land-poor peasants,[1] rapid population growth leading to rising food demand and the closing of paddyland frontiers, marketing systems and importing businesses that were dominated by networks of ethnic Chinese traders, colonial governments lacking the political incentives and financial resources to uplift rural society, competition for paddylands posed by more lucrative export crops, and meager yield growth on account of traditional cultivation techniques. The direness of these conditions did not altogether preclude efforts at improving rural living conditions. There were attempts to induce

[1] Debate continues whether to call self-employed, petty commodity producers peasants. I follow Elson's (1997) historical approach. I use "peasant" for the period prior to WWII, and other terms (smallholders, paddy producers, etc.) afterwards, except in instances that refer to the "peasant" in explicit ideological or political debates or contexts.

migration to "empty" backwaters, to build better irrigation works, and to extend agricultural services, especially following the devastation caused by WWII. But these programs proved piecemeal. None provided the systemic reforms and technological breakthrough required to provide the all-important boosts to rice productivity that finally materialized under the Green Revolution.

These haphazard development efforts did, however, leave their imprint in justifying state intervention in these respective rice sectors, even though interventions in the main floundered. The more this staple cereal was available, the more it brought stability and prosperity, and as such, its politicization was unavoidable. Each colonial government examined below was not blind to the imperative of the access to and availability of rice in securing societal order and a modicum of contentment. Accordingly, over time, but also lurching from crisis to crisis – First World War (WWI), the Great Depression, WWII, postwar economic recovery – these societies experienced the politicization of this chief grain, although in moderately different forms and degrees. Institutionally weak food agencies often prioritized rice imports in order to earn rents for personal or organizational needs, rather than feeding populations. Invariably, these statutory bodies lacked the funds to succeed in the latter task anyway. It was easier and more politically expedient to shift blame onto the ethnic Chinese traders in control of the trade; they were ready targets for opportunistic politicians looking to score points with voters. Such sentiments justified further state regulation of the domestic rice industry, alongside some attempts at controlling the lucrative import business as well. State officials swiftly learned that the margins, and thus profits, on rice imports were vastly superior to domestically marketed rice. Politicians similarly understood that the arrival of large rice imports had the capacity to depress prices swiftly enough to win over urban voters. The more numerous yet less politically sophisticated rural voters, it was believed, would dutifully vote for the candidates or parties as instructed by domineering patrons or leaders of mass organizations.

Colonial governments, and especially their weak, early independent counterparts, increased expenditures in rural society, because incipient elections required the courting of voters. Nor did the existence of these funds challenge the urban bias in policymaking and development. Local officials and their networks captured this rise in public monies, keeping them interested just enough in improving rural livelihoods to encourage more state spending. Nor did differences in the ideological extolling of the peasantry in anticolonial nationalist movements, with Indonesia being the sharpest of the three cases, make marked impact on the ground at this time. Other forms of contentious politics, from the Emergency in

Malaya and the Hukbalahap Rebellion in the Philippines to Islamic and regional rebellions in Indonesia, hamstrung systematic rural development programs; the imperative to defuse these violent, threatening events diverted public monies from rural reconstruction. As this chapter shows, the starkness of the situation – that food insecurity undergirded the political and social instability – made the emergence of the Green Revolution (Chapter 2) seem necessary and urgent. I begin with the case of the Philippines, followed by Malaysia and then Indonesia.

The Philippines

Almost from the moment Filipinos gained firmer control over their own internal affairs, their government, led by President Manuel L. Quezon, seized the opportunity to interfere in the colony's domestic and international rice trade. The year after obtaining Commonwealth status from the colonial administration of the United States in 1935, the public agency National Rice and Corn Corporation (Naric) began operations. Run by Filipino civil servants, Naric's official objectives differed little from those of today's food parastatals in Southeast Asia – to protect the poor producer's livelihood by defending a minimum purchasing price, while ensuring a reasonable cost and a steady supply of rice for the consumer. This aim amounted to achieving greater price stabilization of the islands' chief grains. At the time, rice (and corn) experienced sizable price swings between pre- and postharvest seasons as well as considerable differentials across towns and islands. The Philippine Congress authorized Naric to import duty-free rice, to build and operate warehouses and mills, and to procure crops directly from producers.[2]

A rice crisis in 1934–35 had precipitated Naric's formation. Drought reduced supply, pushing prices up over 25 percent. Despite pressure applied by colonial officials, Manila's traders balked at bringing in higher quantities of cheap rice; doing so would have eroded their domestic profit margins as prices fell. President Quezon declared a state of calamity to allow duty-free rice imports.[3]

With similar crises having occurred in 1902–03 and 1919–20, Philippine politicians averred that Naric's formation would help overcome what they perceived as the principal cause of the islands' food vulnerability – local ethnic Chinese domination of the rice trade. Public

[2] "Must Change Tariff Laws," *Tribune*, May 23, 1936; Buencamino 1938, pp. 17–19; Dawson 1940, pp. 438–39; Wickizer and Bennett 1941, pp. 178–84.
[3] Rice Commission 1936, pp. 23–27; Chiba 2010.

intervention in the rice industry and a concomitant nationalistic wish for increased autarky in staple crop production had its origins in anti-Chinese sentiments.[4]

Barred from owning land, (Hokkien) Chinese traders – pejoratively described as "leeches, grafters" or "heartless profiteers"[5] – had gained control of the postharvest marketing system. Dating from the late nineteenth century, minority trading networks stretched the length of the archipelago and extended from the village variety goods shop (*sari-sari*) to the major rice wholesale market in Binondo in the Chinese quarter of Manila. Known as the Tutuban Exchange, this central marketplace was established by the Philippine-Chinese Rice Merchants Association in the early 1920s; it reflected the strength of Chinese capital over that of British and American firms. Financed by wholesalers, association members owned stakes in mills and warehouses in Central Luzon, the colony's rice bowl.[6] Whether Chinese control of the marketing system was the foremost reason for the dire poverty of the Filipino peasant was open to question. Studies at the time concluded that producers received almost nine-tenths of the wholesale price of rice in Manila for their crop. This meant margins were thin, the marketing system demanded efficiency, and rice trading involved risk.[7]

Regardless, politicians found blaming a politically vulnerable minority for the colony's persistent food ills expedient.[8] The 1936 presidential rice commission, whose recommendation had led to Naric's establishment, wrote that: "Producers and consumers are practically at the mercy of a few rice dealers, middlemen, and speculators who control the industry."[9]

Most stakeholders knew, however, that the enduring rice dilemma and rural destitution had multiple sources. Foremost, the peasantry lacked control over its means of rice production. In the early twentieth century, the Americans took over a colonial society glaringly unequal in land ownership. The Spanish had granted massive tracts of land to their own officials, to Catholic religious orders, and to a lesser degree to local noble islanders (*principalia*), who served chiefly as tax collectors and enforcers of local law and order. These land rewards provided incentives for Spaniards to settle in the islands and to perform administrative duties.

[4] Virata 1949; Wong 1999; Chiba 2010; Doeppers 2016, pp. 92–95.
[5] Hill 1925, p. 20; Abes 1929, p. 15.
[6] Velmonte 1936; Wickberg 1965, p.135; Wong 1999, pp. 4, 63–64, 151–52, 161, 179–81, 199–205; Chiba 2010; Doeppers 2016, pp. 118–22.
[7] Wickizer and Bennett 1941, p. 182, n. 22.
[8] Spencer 1954, p. 96; Wong, 1999, p. 173.
[9] Quoted in Wickizer and Bennett 1941, p. 179.

Over time, intermarriage among wealthier Spaniards, Chinese, and *principalia* occasioned a propertied mestizo class.[10]

Hunger for land fed the bloody nationalist revolution against the Spanish in the countryside that began in 1896.[11] Despite that reality and the islands' long-documented history of agrarian radicalism,[12] the nationalist movement never embraced the peasant as a symbolic defender of freedom and independence. Revealingly, Jose Rizal, the most celebrated mind behind Philippine nationalism, was the scion of a landowning family.[13] Excoriating the impish behavior of the Spanish friars, his novels that had helped to inspire the nationalism that resonated in the 1896 independence revolution bypassed glorifying the Filipino peasant.[14] Although some rural communities later revered Rizal as a demigod or Christ-like figure, reactionary elites scoffed at such folk beliefs.[15]

Filipino revolutionaries, comprising urban proletarians, town artisans, a petite salariat class, and rural producers, combined forces to defeat the Spanish. Yet the landed gentry, who were directly implicated in rural exploitation, had gained control of the revolution and extinguished its populist impulses. This included ordering the slaying of the radical Andreas Bonifacio, the nationalist figure who most ably articulated mass grievances, including those of the peasantry.[16]

Nor did it help matters that the Americans subsequently instigated a bloody war against so-called Filipino insurrectionists that lasted until 1902. In an effort to help quell the disquiet over the violence, US officials set about redistributing land. But they did so half-heartedly. Homesteading based on the American model failed.[17] Instead, the Americans espoused a social conservatism expressed in the sanctity of property rights and liquidated many of the friar estates. Both enabled the landed gentry (*cacqiue*) to consolidate and accumulate even more land through legal, semilegal, and illegal means. The initiation of elections with a limited landowning electorate entrenched the political standing of this *cacique* class.[18]

Meager plots could hardly sustain peasant subsistence. Obliged to surrender a third to half their crop to the landlord in return for the right

[10] Spencer 1954, p. 115; Wickberg 1965, pp. 29–30; McLennan 1982, p. 69; Roth 1982, p. 135.
[11] Constantino and Constantino 1978, p. 8. [12] Sturtevant 1976.
[13] Ocampo 2008, pp. 32–36.
[14] Larkin 1972, p. 184; Interview, Zeus Salazar, former head of the history department at the University of the Philippines, Quezon City, December 23, 2016.
[15] Ileto 1979. [16] Constantino 1975, pp. 164–70. [17] Pelzer 1945, chapter 8.
[18] Allen 1938, p. 54; Friend 1965, p. 20; McLennan 1982, pp. 69–72; Roth 1982, p.131; Anderson 1988; Putzel 1992, p. 54; Veneracion 2001, chapter 7.

to work the land and to reimburse the provision of seeds and other inputs by the landlord, share tenants typically owed even more. Lacking sufficient storage facilities, they had to repay rice rations borrowed at usurious rates from landlords in order to survive the dry preharvest "hungry" season.[19]

By the 1930s, owing to swift population growth, the land frontier of the central plains of Luzon Island began to close.[20] The colonial arrangement of permitting duty-free sugar exports into the US hastened the conversion of paddylands into sugar plantations, especially in the Central Luzon provinces of Pampanga and Tarlac and in the islands of the Visayas in the central Philippines.[21] As land values rose in response, it pushed up tenancy rates. In Central Luzon, producers had to surrender over 60 percent of their harvest. A measured fall in per capita consumption of rice indicated deterioration in rural welfare.[22]

As capitalist modes of production also seeped into rice cultivation, bourgeoning landlord leverage eroded the semifeudal patron–client bonds that had paternalistically obligated the landlord to share in tenant preservation. With an upswing in rice cultivation profitability, plantation owners began to mechanize and market a larger share of the harvest. Tenant insecurity intensified. If tenants contested their evictions, they confronted the coercive powers of estate managers and of the expanding central government in the form of the Philippine Constabulary.[23]

That these changes spawned physical confrontations surprised few. But as the leaders of the upswing in violence justified the conflicts in ideological terms, elite society became alarmed.[24] In response, and as part of his "Social Justice" program, President Quezon strengthened in 1933 what had been a toothless American colonial act protecting peasant tenancy. A landlord-controlled Philippines Congress scuttled the act's implementation, however, and starved subsequent institutional reforms of funding.[25] Still, share tenants were better off on average than the growing number of landless agricultural laborers who were earning "starvation wages."[26]

[19] Velmonte 1936; Allen 1938, p. 62; Dawson 1940, pp. 395–96, 410; Takahashi 1969, p. 137.
[20] Takahashi 1969, pp. 7–8, tables 1 and 2; Fegan 1982.
[21] Allen 1938, esp. pp. 52–65; Friend 1965, p. 6; McLennan 1982.
[22] Wickizer and Bennett 1941, pp. 192–93, 223–24; Spencer 1954, pp. 120, 122, table 8; Putzel 1992, p. 55.
[23] Spencer 1954, pp. 158–67; Kerkvliet 1977, chapter 1; Fegan 1982.
[24] Allen 1938; Jacoby 1949, pp. 213–15; Sturtevant 1976, chapter 13; Terami-Wada 2014.
[25] Allen 1938, p. 53; Wurfel 1954; Murray 1972.
[26] Rivera and McMillan 1952, p. 168.

Farming remained stuck in a mode of low productivity. Yields were among the lowest in Asia; indebted share tenants had little incentive to enrich landlords through investment in technological upgrades.[27] This, coupled with the Chinese stranglehold over the marketing system, meant that expectations of Naric were low.[28] Nor did a paltry budget and a pervasive ideology inherited from the Americans of limited government augur well.[29]

But in the six years prior to the Japanese army's invasion in December 1941, Naric carved out a small but symbolic space of a new state channel in marketing. Although the agency's procurement rate amounted to only 0.5 percent of the total crop, it was sufficient to create the impression that alternatives to private traders existed. Naric built a number of warehouses, and producers regarded rice grading at its mills as fair.[30] Timely rice imports also helped to diminish price fluctuations between seasons and across islands and towns. Naric also benefited from good fortune. Favorable weather and some paddyland expansion boosted domestic production. Expansion occurred outside Central Luzon but also within; a new quota limiting sugar exports to the US (due to the Great Depression) put more land under rice cultivation.[31] Under the Commonwealth (1935–45), the colony was importing annually under 60,000 metric tons of rice on average, or about 30 percent less than ten years prior.[32]

WWII to Electoral Imports

The WWII Japanese Occupation devastated the Philippines, although at first it had marginal impact on the rice harvest. But as warfare dragged on and aggravated cultivation systems, starvation was widespread by the occupation's final year.[33] Following the war, efforts were trained on economic recovery and rehabilitation. The Americans provided hundreds of millions of dollars in aid that also offset war damages. Some of

[27] Spencer 1954, p. 49; Takahasi 1969, pp. 130–32.
[28] Wickizer and Bennett 1941, pp. 178–81.
[29] Buencamino 1938, pp. 14–15, 21, 107–08; Golay 1961, p. 182; Palmer 1975, p. 13; Hawes 1987, p. 24.
[30] Buencamino 1938, pp. 24–25, 46–48; Virata 1949; Friend 1965, p. 15; Mears, Agabin, Anden, et al. 1974, p. 10; Palmer 1975, p. 4; Chiba 2010.
[31] Department of Agriculture and Commerce 1939, pp. 6, 15; Wickizer and Bennett 1941, p. 92; Jacoby 1949, p. 175; Mangahas, Recto, and Ruttan 1966; Palmer 1975, p. 7; Corpuz 1997, pp. 253–55.
[32] Department of Agriculture and Commerce 1939, pp. 16–17; Wickizer and Bennett 1941, p. 92; Corpuz 1997, pp. 286–88, table 7.
[33] Hartendorp 1958, pp. 117–21; Agoncillo 1965, chapter 11; Kerkvliet 1977, pp. 75–76.

the money paid for large rice imports, as cultivation took years to recover.[34] The Americans also kept control of high-level economic decision-making, including parity rights for their investors.[35] As a result of a balance-of-payments crisis in 1949 and 1950, caused in part by a drawdown in US postwar reconstruction spending, Philippine policy-makers introduced import duties, import and foreign exchange controls, and an overvalued currency to protect domestic industries from foreign competition. This policy of import-substitution industrialization (ISI) was intended to shift the economy away from dependence on the export of raw materials and the importation of manufactured goods. ISI was also meant to bolster local control over the country's productive resources. Philippine ownership in manufacturing did expand in the 1950s.[36] Yet this form of economic nationalism failed to lift rural incomes. Concentrated in Manila, ISI forged few linkages with the countryside, and because policies rendered access to capital relatively cheap, ISI encouraged capital-intensive activities. With population growth outstripping steady job creation in the modern sector, millions remained stuck in low-productivity farm employment. The country's agricultural workforce outnumbered manufacturing employees by more than six-to-one.[37]

Politics furthered *cacique* domination and rural destitution. Notable was the central government's defeat in 1953 of the peasant-led Hukbalahap insurgency, which had started a year after WWII's end in 1946. The actual extent of Communist influence over the Huks, as they were known, remains unsettled. Yet the rebellion that was concentrated in the country's rice bowl convinced some Filipino elites and US officials of the urgency of implementing land reform to break the cycle of agrarian unrest and to check Communism's spread. At the insurgency's onset, President Roxas amended the 1933 Rice (Share) Tenancy Act to mandate a 70:30 distribution of the harvest between the tenant and landowner. As the conflict waned, President Ramon Magsaysay, a staunch US ally who as defense secretary had overseen anti-Huk operations, added his own pro-tenant amendments in 1954.[38]

Magsaysay also strengthened procedures to enable share tenants to become leaseholders and established a specialized court for agrarian

[34] Friend 1965, pp. 258–59; Jose 1999, p. 214.
[35] Parity rights meant that in their investments Americans and Filipinos enjoyed equal rights (Golay 1961, pp. 64–67; Pomeroy 1974, chapter 2; Payner 1973).
[36] Payner 1973; Maxfield and Nolt 1990.
[37] Spencer 1954, pp. 216–17; Power and Sicat 1971, pp. 34–50; Sicat 1972, pp. 5–7; Palmer 1975, p. 2.
[38] Spencer, 1954, p. 233; Pomeroy 1974, pp. 26–38; Kerkvliet 1977, pp. 237–47; Fegan 1982; Wurfel 1988, p. 225.

disputes. With the insurgency's defeat, however, the rebellion failed to convince Congressmen and other landed elites to enact genuine redistribution.[39] A long-time observer remarked, "the Magsaysay administration chose to seek social change and economic progress primarily within the existing institutional framework."[40] This framework was decidedly stacked against the interests of poor cultivators.

As such, policies, programs, and agencies that on paper were designed to help the rural poor fell short for a variety of reasons.[41] Among these was a reconstituted Naric. Its responsibilities had been expanded to include overseeing the development of the rice (and corn) industries in their entirety and improving the welfare of smallholders.[42]

Naric competed fiercely over scarce resources with other state entities that were also ostensibly designed to tackle rural poverty. Juan Chioco, Naric's chairman under the Nacionalista Party administrations of Magsaysay and Carlos Garcia, complained that his agency's "starvation" finances had been "dissipated during the wasteful years of the [previous] Liberal Administration" under President Elipido Quirino (1948–53).[43]

A private association of large rice producers, along with the leadership of government-formed cooperatives (FACOMAS) and the cooperatives' public credit agency (ACCFA), attacked Naric repeatedly. They charged it with colluding with "alien" middlemen and for importing rice ostensibly to fund its operations, since buying duty-free foreign rice was cheaper than procuring local rice.[44] With their livelihoods threatened by the imports, these producer groups derisively referred to foreign rice as "coolie-produced" and blamed the grain's importation for "killing" the domestic rice industry.[45] Chioco retorted that the anti-inflationary cheap rice policy of Magsaysay's (and later Garcia's) government, which had pegged retail rice at 0.85 pesos per *ganta*, tied Naric's hands, forcing it to import rice in significant quantities.[46]

Amid an environment of conflicting objectives and accusations and counteraccusations that cereal policies were simultaneously

[39] Wurfel 1954; Tadem 1986, p. 10; Slater 2010, pp. 93–102. [40] Golay 1961, p. 94.
[41] Palmer 1975, p. 13; Ofreneo 1987, p. 42; Smith 1988, pp. 163–64; Putzel 1992, p. 90. An exception was the 1951 Minimum Wage Law, from which landlords in Congress excluded rural labor (Doronila 1992, p. 63).
[42] Golay 1961, pp. 384–85.
[43] Chioco 1958, p. 15. See also Wurfel (1988, p. 104); Doronila (1992, p. 101).
[44] Concepcion 1958, p. 93. FACOMAS: Farmers' Cooperative Marketing Associations; ACCFA: Agricultural Credit and Cooperative Financing Administration.
[45] Benitez 1958, pp. 106–09.
[46] Half of Naric's P49 million credit line with the Philippine National Bank was reserved for imports (Philippine National Bank 1958, pp. iii). A *ganta*, a traditional measure of weight, is approximately equal to three US quarts.

producer-oriented and pro-consumer, corruption allegations against Naric became overwhelming.[47] In 1962, the government replaced it with the Rice and Corn Administration (RCA) and tasked it with similar responsibilities.[48]

Three other major policy changes had profound effects on the country's rice sector, until the initial release of "miracle seeds" or MVs following Marcos's first electoral victory in 1965 (Chapter 2). First, in 1960, two years after President Garcia unveiled his "Filipino First" campaign, the Nacionalista-controlled Congress promulgated the Rice and Corn Nationalization Act (R.A. 3018). It was intended to eliminate Chinese traders from the perishable food marketing system.[49] To aid in the Filipinization of rice and corn marketing, the government established a new implementing agency. Filipino traders could apply to the Rice and Corn Organizing Board (RICOB) for loans, while Chinese traders were required to register with the agency.[50] Implementation flustered the country's notoriously weak bureaucracy. The Garcia government instead pinned mishaps on Chinese middlemen. Supply chain disruption was cushioned by the setting up of "dummy" companies by Chinese traders in the names of Filipino wives or offspring from such unions and the increased naturalization of Chinese residents. The policy hurt many smallholders as easy credit from traders dried up, and government substitutes were in short supply.[51]

Second were the effects of the devaluation of the peso and the abolition of the government's control measures on the economy. Decontrol, as it was known, was initiated by Diosdado Macapagal of the Liberal Party, winner of the 1961 presidential election. The policy was pushed by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the US government, but also by the country's sugar tycoons. They had bankrolled Macapagal's campaign, since a devalued peso would augment their profits abroad.[52] With liberalization opening the country to foreign

[47] Mears, Agabin, Anden, et al. 1974, pp. 16–17; Mangahas 1975, p. 297.

[48] "Editorial: What RCA Shouldn't Be: Old Naric in New Sack," *The Manila Times*, June 16, 1962; Amelina 2004.

[49] The 1954 Nationalization Retail Trade Act, passed under the Magsaysay administration, had failed to accomplish that (Golay 1961, pp. 324–27; Doronila 1992, pp. 71–74; Abinales and Amoroso 2005, pp. 182–85; Hau 2014, pp. 6, 31–32).

[50] "Withdrawal of Alien Millers (196) and Warehouse Operators (22) as of May 31 '62," *The Manila Times*, July 13, 1962; "Filipinos Not Ready for Rice, Corn Trade?" *The Manila Times*, May 19, 1963.

[51] Appleton 1960; "Aliens Find Loopholes in Rice Trade Law," *The Manila Times*, January 12, 1963; "Rice Decision Delay Feared," *The Manila Times*, October 11, 1963; Mears, Agabin, Anden, *et al.* 1974, p. 103.

[52] Pomeroy 1974, pp. 28–29; Bello, Kinley, and Elinson 1982, p. 131; Hawes 1987, p. 37; Wurfel 1988, pp. 16, 57.

investment, decontrol also brought Garcia's Filipino First policies to a formal end. It also reignited a commodity boom that prompted the conversion (or reconversion) of rice (and corn) lands to sugar. The terms of trade were turned against smallholders, as the costs of imported inorganic fertilizer components, for example, rose.[53]

Lastly, under the pressure of cut-throat two-party competition,[54] a politicized electoral cycle of rice imports gained traction. For the 1961 presidential polls and for the 1963 mid-term elections, incumbents opportunistically over-imported rice to push down retail prices. By 1965, the incumbent's administration raised the game to new heights: For his electoral contest against Ferdinand Marcos, Macapagal brought in a record 569,000 tons, or what amounted to over 20 percent of domestic production.[55] Even with his defeat, the *Manila Times* editorialized: "The temptation to resort to this scheme is too great for any administration to resist under most circumstances."[56]

With this stratagem, parties seemed to be favoring the urban consumer, even though rural voters outnumbered their urban counterparts by a large factor. Local elites believed they could rely on dyadic patron-client ties to corral the former into voting for their preferred party. Failing this, the threat or use of coercion was readily available.[57] In the end, the tactic faltered: The over-importing incumbent lost these contests. He did so for many reasons, including the norm of alternating power between the Liberal and Nacionalista parties that had coalesced since WWII. But neither did the intended dips in rice retail prices materialize; traders learned to anticipate the import deluge. Presciently, they withheld their stocks "to wait for better times."[58]

Malaya/Malaysia

Like the Americans in the colonial Philippines, the British in Malaya favored the export commodity sector over that of food crops. Lucrative tin mining was followed by a boom in rubber cultivation, itself buoyed by the explosive growth of the automobile industry in the US in the early

[53] Treadgold and Hooley 1967; Iglesias 1973; Payner 1973, pp. 66–67; Palmer 1975, p. 11; Takagi 2016, pp. 130–31, chapter 5.
[54] Landé 1965.
[55] "The Peralta Report on Rice Imports," *The Manila Times*, June 28, 1963; "Rice Now a Political Tool Too," *The Manila Times*, July 7, 1963; Rice and Corn Administration 1971, p. 13; Apiraksirikul and Barker, 1976; Barker 1985, p. 195, table 1; Latham 2024, p. 36.
[56] "Rice Imports," *The Manila Times*, March 5, 1965. [57] Landé 1965; Sidel 1999.
[58] Mangahas 1968, p. 33. See also Golay and Goodstein (1967); Mangahas (1975, p. 302); Palmer (1975, p. 13); Tadem (1986, p. 2); Doronila (1992, p. 156).

twentieth century. These commodity spurts resulted in the encouragement by the British of an influx of unskilled immigrant laborers, who toiled under difficult conditions. On the whole, Tamil Indians tapped rubber trees on semirural estates, and Chinese worked in tin mines. By 1931, the local population was up over 60 percent to 4.4 million from just 20 years earlier.[59] Because these wage laborers consumed rather than cultivated rice, and because lands devoted to rubber outstripped those devoted to paddy by more than four to one, Malaya imported on average about two-thirds of its annual rice requirements prior to WWII.[60] The health of the export economy to afford the imports, the conversion of vast tracks of land to paddy cultivation in mainland Southeast Asia, and improvements in land and sea transportation that carried this cheap rice to international markets made this extreme dependency viable.[61]

The depiction of British rule as "the century of neglect" of the Malay cultivator has merit.[62] The colonial state preferred investing public monies raised by excise taxes on rubber exports, and on the import of opium, to build an extensive infrastructure that supported profitable enterprises.[63] When unfavorable weather in the rice-exporter regions led to poor harvests – from 1918 to 1920, for example – or when export commodity prices slumped – for example, from 1920 to 1922 and 1930 to 1932 – hand-wringing over Malaya's food vulnerability would intensify. The government would tighten controls over the rice trade until commodity prices rebounded or good weather resumed.[64]

There were piecemeal attempts to bolster rice production in order to improve peasant well-being. In 1906, an irrigation project was opened in the northwestern plains of the peninsula, followed by government-run mills and cooperatives. Experiments faltered, however, to free the perpetually indebted Malay cultivator from Chettiar Indian money-lenders and Chinese traders, shopkeepers, and millers. The latter staunchly defended free trade in rice.[65]

Officials in Kuala Lumpur and in London were also reluctant to invest in a sector, or a people, that they deemed unprofitable. Illustratively, by objecting to higher producer prices, they sided with British rubber and tin barons who preferred cheap rice to keep wages low.[66] When periods

[59] Grist 1936, p. 132; Jacoby 1949, p. 102. [60] Farnsworth 1938.
[61] Jacoby 1949, p. 110; Dobby 1955, pp. 81–88; Owen 1971; Cheng 1973, pp. 26–31; Kratoska 1982. For a revisionist account, see Coclanis (1993).
[62] Courtenay 1995, p. 6; see also Goh (1934); Hill (2013).
[63] Thompson 1943, pp. 187–88; Lim 1977, pp. 72–73; Trocki 1990.
[64] Gunsaulus 1919; Federated Malay States 1931, p. 14; Grist 1936, p. 31.
[65] Overton 1994; Wu 2011.
[66] Thompson 1943, p. 33; Jacoby 1949, p. 112; Jomo 1986, p. 48.

of scarcity did push up rice prices, the effects reverberated throughout the local economy. Buildings "which were started in 1918," one US consular dispatch from 1920 described, "were nowhere near finished owing to having to pay so much more for labor."[67] Another reported that, as "in the case of almost everything in Malaya, the amount of rice consumed is in direct ratio to the prosperity of the rubber and tin industries."[68]

Reading market signals correctly, many paddy cultivators – more than 95 percent of whom it was estimated to be Malay – adapted to changing conditions by planting rubber. Profits from one acre of rubber were estimated to be nearly tenfold those from paddy.[69] Because widespread smallholder participation in the rubber boom threatened the profits of plantation capitalists, twice – from 1922 to 1928 and then 1934 to 1941 – officials instituted restrictive trading schemes ostensibly to stabilize prices by preventing oversupply. In the end, colonial regulations damaged the material interests of small-scale rubber cultivators irreparably.[70]

Regardless, the typical bureaucrat held dear to the paternalistic belief that government policies were "pro-Malay." Alongside British colonial society, officials developed an elaborate ideological scaffolding built on primordial ideas of Malays as natural peasants living a contented existence in rural villages (*kampung*). It was in this milieu, it was argued, that they could best preserve traditional ways of life amid broader societal changes around them.[71]

Colonial land policy reflected these beliefs, along with other interests. Starting in 1913, the British passed a long series of enactments, as the stress on tappers' income created by the volatility in rubber prices began to surface.[72] Regulations outlawed the alienation of land, notably to non-Malays, in designated paddyland reserves and prohibited rubber cultivation within them. These laws sought to protect growers from minority traders or moneylenders and to stave off a crisis of landlessness. Yet regulation permitted opportunistic, better-off Malays to become lenders and speculators too.[73] While resistance to and evasion of the controls were pervasive, these enactments confined some half-million Malay

[67] Dickinson 1920, p. 2. [68] Farnsworth 1938, p. 1.
[69] One acre equals 0.4 hectare (Jack 1923, p. 44; Tan 1963, p. 14).
[70] Bauer 1948, pp. 87–90; Lim 1977, pp. 145–51, 193–94. The Stevenson Plan pertained to Malaya and Ceylon; the second was more internationally encompassing.
[71] For a representative statement, see Haynes (1923, p. i). British discourse shifted from viewing Malays as being lazy to needing protection (Means 1970, p. 43; Syed Hussein 1977, chapter 2).
[72] On the price volatility, see Sultan Narzrin Shah (2017, p. 35, figure 2.2; p. 100, figure 4.8).
[73] Puthucheary 1960, p. 11; Jomo 1986, p. 50; Shamsul 2004, p. 28.

paddy planters to subsistence agriculture, dependent on a crop with pitiful returns in order to feed an expanding proletarian labor force. In the name of aiding this class of cultivators, colonial policies denied it opportunities to accumulate the requisite capital necessary to participate in and benefit from the colony's economic expansion.[74]

As the effects of the Great Depression took hold and foreign rice supplies were threatened with disruption, the government paid growers more attention. It convened a rice cultivation committee, whose 1931 report recommended reforms to the exploitative local credit system. Save for the 1932 formation of an autonomous Drainage and Irrigation Department, tangible action remained negligible.[75]

With effects of the Depression deepening and many immigrant laborers – those not repatriated – without work, the British considered allowing non-Malays more access to paddylands to boost domestic production. Aristocratic Malays, including local sultans, however, voiced their objections to these plans. Buttressed by the British as conservative standard bearers to preserve the local social order amid unprecedented economic change, they blamed the lack of locally grown rice on rubber cultivation. They argued that "our sense of patriotism compels us to protect Malay lands from the activities and influences of outsiders… Swamped out of the padi fields, the Malays will be literally deprived of their only certain means of livelihood."[76] For decades, Malays in droves were exiting paddyfields in search of a *better* means of livelihood. There were simply too few cultivators to satisfy local consumption needs.[77] On the eve of Japan's invasion of Malaya, rice imports had reached unprecedented levels.[78]

From WWII to Independence

After WWII, as elsewhere in the British Empire, decolonization proceeded along a quasi-procedural path of negotiations that guided the transition of power. The absence of bottom-up, anticolonial violence benefited Malaya's grateful sultans, who retained their exalted, if not exploitative, place, especially in rural society. From 1945 to 1948, fearful of the loss of their special rights and privileges, as well as a corresponding empowerment of commoners, Malay aristocrats and other elites did

[74] Jack 1923, p. 46; Thompson 1943, pp. 306–07; Tan 1963, p. 32; Ness 1967, pp. 31–35; Ungku Aziz 1964.
[75] Goh 1934; Federated Malay States 1931.
[76] Cited in Patton 1939, pp. 4–5. The article was published in *Majliss*, a popular Malay newspaper.
[77] Farnsworth 1938. [78] Bower 1931; Ellis 1941.

bitterly protest a controversial arrangement known as the Malayan Union. Formulated in London, this politically liberal proposal sought to grant Malaya's locally born Chinese and Indians equal citizenship rights upon independence.[79] Bargaining and some acts of civil disobedience ensued. Notably, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) was formed out of opposition to the Malayan Union. But these developments had political implications for the peasantry. Due to Malaya's distinctive demographics with its large Chinese minority population, its equally distinctive political economy with its finely delineated ethnic division of labor, and its privileged aristocratic class intact, a great deal of political energy was directed at maintaining special Malay rights and interests, particularly against the Chinese. This necessitated pleading with and relying on the British for help, rather than creating opportunities for more confrontational tactics, such as stimulating agrarian nationalism. Consider UMNO recruitment. Schoolteachers actively mobilized grassroots support, and although party branches were established in small towns and larger villages, these upwardly mobile backers did not appeal directly to the peasantry with promises of uplift.[80] The peasantry was further denied a capable coalitional partner or mobilizer owing to the absence of a dynamic non-Chinese Left in local politics. Due to British repression and the deep religiosity of Malay society, Malay leftist organizations had remained marginal players in the incipient nationalist movement of the colony and later that of the country.[81]

Meanwhile, economically, into the mid-1950s, tin and rubber exports still accounted for over 40 percent of gross domestic product.[82] While the historian Paul Kratoska characterized postwar British efforts to grow more food as "a dismal chronicle of failure," changing conditions, including the thinness of the international rice market, at least forced officials to reconsider their laissez-faire doctrines.[83] Rice imports into Malaya were about a third of their prewar levels.[84] So, in step with the postwar centralization of authority, the government took control of rice imports. It also instituted a rationing program, and in 1949 – to raise the income of paddy growers – introduced a guaranteed minimum price (GMP). Officials paid farmers a subsidy for each *pikul* of paddy they harvested.[85]

[79] Lau 1989. [80] Fennell 1968, esp. p. 502; Harper 1996, esp. p. 246.
[81] Means 1970, pp. 92–93, 194–96; Vasil 1971; Roff 1994, pp. 229–35; Weiss 2006, pp. 90–102.
[82] Lim 1975, p. 2. [83] Kratoska 1988, p. 37. [84] Drabble 2000, p. 150.
[85] Barnett 1947, p.13; Selvadurai 1972, p. 1. One *pikul* is equivalent to about 60.5 kilograms, or 133.3 (US) pounds.

In line with these pro-rural policies, the government established the Rural Industrial Development Agency (RIDA) in 1950.[86] To make RIDA effective, fact-gathering committees were constituted. Reports published in 1953 and in 1956 suggested more public investment, a GMP increase, and (once again) reform of the exploitative credit and land tenure system. But pressing security and political economy matters overrode the committee's recommendations.[87]

First was the Emergency. British forces, aided by Malay regiments, faced a guerrilla insurrection instigated by the Chinese-dominant Malayan Communist Party in 1948 and waged by its armed wing, Malayan National Liberation Army. The money that was to fund rice-related research, irrigation, and planning instead financed the decade-long counter-insurgency campaign. Moreover, the commodity boom experienced by Malaya's export economy, on account of the Korean War, proved so valuable in resuscitating Britain's moribund postwar economy that it exceeded consideration of spending Malaya's surplus on rural development.[88]

Postwar developments also hardly dislodged the intersection of interests between British estate owners and conservative Malay rulers; the latter continued to prioritize social and institutional stability by keeping Malays under their tutelage and on the farm, so to speak. As Rudner noted, unlike rubber cultivation, which was deemed to be infused with alien influences,[89] paddy "cultivation was still treated as a cultural symbol of communal stability on the part of the Malay elite and British authorities, rather than a system of production to be modernized."[90]

With little change in the structure of rice agriculture, it surprised few when in the 1950s it was learned that anywhere between half and two-thirds of the planters in the northern province of Kedah, the peninsula's granary, were tenants; moreover, their land rents were constantly on the rise.[91] Yet so too was paddy production. Because of small technical improvements in irrigation, seed varieties, and fertilizer coverage that

[86] Dobby 1949, p. 9; Ness 1967, chapter 5.

[87] Federation of Malaya 1953; Federation of Malaya 1956, p. v. See also "Editorial: Rice Policy Whitewash," *The Straits Times*, July 10, 1954.

[88] "$6 Mil. Scheme to Grow More Rice," *The Straits Times*, April 2, 1954; "Editorial: Down on the Farm," *The Straits Times*, April 27, 1954; Rudner 1972; Stubbs 1989, pp. 107–14, 168–80; Drabble 2000, p. 157.

[89] One historian writes that the rubber industry "was a creature of the imperial state" (Lees 2017, p. 175).

[90] Rudner 1975b, p. 13; see also Roff (1994, p. 149); Shamsul (2004, pp. 85–86). A distinction was made between "migrants" from Java and Sumatra in the Federated States associated with rubber planting and the paddy farmers of the Unfederated States (Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Johor) who commanded attention of the royalty (Jackson 1968, chapter 10).

[91] Ungku Aziz 1956; Wilson 1958, pp. 27, 35–62, 97–98; Nonini 1992, pp. 10–14.

spawned limited double-cropping, output expanded annually at a strong estimated average rate of 5.7 percent from 1951 to 1967. Yields in Malaya/Malaysia were the highest regionwide, notwithstanding suspicions of an upward bias in the data.[92]

In his writings, one celebrated critic, the economist and one-time vice-provost of the University of Malaya, Ungku Abdul Aziz, maintained that the exploitation of the Malay paddy grower by Chinese middlemen explained the discrepancy between deepening poverty and expanding harvests.[93] While Ungku Aziz's jeremiads gradually gained political saliency (see below), some questioned his empirics. Based on fieldwork conducted in the early 1960s, one foreign scholar concluded that planters were receiving about three-quarters of the retail price of rice.[94] Some agreed with this favorable figure, while others opined that it masked other forms of exploitation.[95]

Public and academic discourse clashed over whether cash-poor growers preferred the speedy, flexible credit from Chinese dealers or that from more institutional channels, such as credit cooperatives or a state agency with its time-consuming procedures.[96] A concurrent debate considered whether the face of rural exploitation was gaining Malay features, as a landlord class, mostly of civil servants, was actively investing in paddyland.[97]

A third debate unfolded between the public and private sectors over control of the rice trade as the harvests of mainland Southeast Asia by the 1950s had recovered from WWII.[98] An international market surplus caused a steep fall in prices and forced the Malayan government to recalibrate its interventionist policies. In 1955, in a partial step toward reopening the rice trade, the government allowed licensed traders to import rice. Because the former held to its strategic stockpile (introduced following WWII), dealers also were mandated to purchase one ton from the stockpile for every two brought into Malaya in order to minimize the stockpile's costs and ascertain its turnover.[99]

[92] The figure pertains to Peninsular Malaysia ("KHCHO" 1961; Purvis and Polman 1965, pp. 39, 147, table 6.5; Tan and Weaver 1969, pp. 2, 3, table 1).
[93] Ungku Aziz 1958; one example of many columns, "Let's Not Lead Malays Up the Padi Path," *The Straits Times*, March 5, 1957.
[94] Purcal 1971, pp. 123–24.
[95] Snodgrass 1980, p. 128; Nonini 1992, p. 155. Tan (1982, chapter 7) summarizes the debate and literature.
[96] Tan 1963, p. 31; Narkswasdi and Selvadurai 1968, p. 141; Wong 1981, p. 5; Fatimah 1982; Horowitz 2000, pp. 118–19.
[97] Harper 1999, pp. 240–41. [98] Latham 2024, chapter 2.
[99] This variable tariff structure periodically changed depending on international prices, domestic production, reserve levels, and grain quality (Vokes 1978, pp. 83–95). Due to the Emergency, domestic controls and rations remained.

Traders raised objections. The United Rice Association, an umbrella organization of 18 Chinese importer groups, warned that licensing would favor larger traders with government connections and lead to a cartel.[100] According to the Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the stockpile policy would push up prices and thus harm workers and the urban poor. Since retailers and wholesalers earned profits mostly on imported rice (largely from Thailand), for which middle-class, urban consumers were willing to pay a premium, the costs would be passed on to poorer consumers.[101] Margins on domestic rice trading were minuscule. (This led major Teochew merchants, such as Teo Soo Chuan, described as the "King of Rice of Malaysia," and Robert Kuok Hock Nien, later Malaysia's richest businessman, eventually to diversify from rice.[102]) The government rejected a proposal by trader associations to finance and manage the public stocks themselves, which they proposed would save M$20 million or so of public funds spent annually on the stockpile.[103]

As international prices softened, the indebted government could no longer afford a GMP at M$17 per *pikul* of paddy. At the same time, traders were earning windfall profits due to the widening gulf between foreign and domestic prices, which also encouraged smuggling. Accordingly, an increased supply of cheap rice, of both the legal and illegal variety, pushed real farmgate prices below the GMP.[104] In 1955, the government thus controversially lowered the GMP to M$12. The cut, which occurred in the run-up to the inaugural semisovereign Federal elections of 1955, signaled the power of urban consumer interests.[105]

With the 1955 victory of the Alliance – a coalition of political parties comprising UMNO, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malayan Indian Congress – and with the granting of Malaya's independence in 1957, populist pressures to enhance the incomes of rural Malays grew weightier. UMNO's vocal nationalist impatient rank-and-file demanded that the state adopt interventionist policies.[106]

[100] "Opinion Still Divided on Rice Decontrol," *Singapore Standard*, July 20, 1955; "Govt. Warned of a Rice Racket," *Malay Mail*, December 21, 1955.

[101] "Report on Free Rice Trade to May Go to Govt.," *The Malay Mail*, August 25, 1955; "Warning on Rice Cess," *The Malay Mail*, January 20, 1956.

[102] Lee 1978, pp. 64, 83 n. 33; 111 n.6; Huff 1989; Jesudason 1990, p. 34; Heng 1999; Searle 1999, pp. 224–27; Tanzer 2017, pp. 61–62, 82–86, 102–03, 110, 114–18.

[103] "$20m to Prove Trade Right," *The Malay Mail*, August 22, 1955; "Import Offer," *The Straits Times*, December 19, 1955. Traders railed against the stockpile policy for years.

[104] "The $12 Floor for Rice," *The Straits Times*, December 21, 1954; "Rice is Freed at Last," *The Straits Times*, January 3, 1955; Ruggles 1956; Siamwalla and MacIntyre 2001, p. 256.

[105] "Controls on Rice Imports Lifted," *The Straits Times*, December 8, 1954.

[106] Foreign Service Despatch 1954.

To prove that the multiethnic coalitional government could collaborate, the Alliance raised the GMP to M$14 per *pikul*.[107] Then, in 1956, it created the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda).[108] Felda was designed to oversee a costly poverty-alleviation program of resettling Malay smallholders on newly cleared lands. Participants were to receive subsidized inputs and capital to plant rubber trees (and later palm oil). Even as funding shifted from RIDA to Felda, the latter's ample budget signaled a degree of dedication to rural development. Felda, however, demonstrated fleeting interest in improving rice cultivation or the marketing system per se.[109]

Broader political calculations handcuffed this pro-smallholder movement. UMNO's elite, led by Tunku Abdul Rahman, who became the country's first prime minister, favored a continuation of British open economy policies.[110] Where intervention was justified, it was on behalf of Malays in the economy's modern sectors.[111] Moreover, because of UMNO's dependence on the rising class of rural Malay landlords as vote mobilizers, redistributive policies were hardly enforced.[112] Meanwhile, corruption, bureaucratic ineptitude, and conflict between the federal and state governments over matters pertaining to land plagued Felda's operations.[113]

Although in 1959 the Alliance won the second federal election handily, it polled nearly 30 percent less and lost about a quarter of its seats in the Federal Legislative Council. (It had held nearly all the seats.) The increase in registered Chinese voters, on account of a new path to citizenship contained in the 1957 Merdeka Constitution, diminished support for the Alliance. But importantly, UMNO also lost state elections in two predominately Malay agrarian states, Terengganu and Kelantan, to the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party. It was buoyed by formidable grassroots support among Islamic schools and teachers. Results indicated considerable dissatisfaction with UMNO among rural Malays, whose party loyalty was no longer assured.[114]

[107] "Padi: A $14 floor price," *The Straits Times*, December 10, 1955.
[108] Then it was known by the acronym FLDA. I use its subsequent and popular acronym.
[109] Ness 1967, chapter 7; Jesudason 1990, chapter 3; Henley 2015, p. 115–24.
[110] Jesudason 1990, p. 52–56; Searle 1999, pp. 33–36.
[111] The Alliance's first Five-Year Malayan Plan (1956–60), influenced by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development's (IBRD) study of the economy, reflected this view (Silcock 1962, pp. 359–60; Ungku Aziz 1964, p. 82; Funston 1980, pp. 150–51, 174; Snodgrass 1980, p. 47.)
[112] Wilson 1958, pp. 96–97; Vokes 1978, p. 56.
[113] Ness 1967, chapter 7; Harper 1999, p. 252.
[114] McGee 1962; Means 1970, pp. 226–32; Horowitz 2000, pp. 414–16. This Islamic party later changed its name to Parti Islam SeMalaysia, or PAS.

With the combination of 1) the winding down of the Emergency, which meant improved stability in the countryside and empowered state institutions to penetrate that countryside; 2) a 1958 recession depressing rural incomes; and 3) disappointing 1959 electoral results, the Alliance cabinet finally took some measures to reinvigorate the pro-farmer movement.[115] It transferred responsibility for the underperforming Felda to a new Ministry for National and Rural Development, headed by the capable leadership of Deputy PM (and later PM) Tun Abdul Razak. This arrangement resulted in a hefty budgetary increase for the resettlement program.[116] Plans were also accelerated to build a large-scale irrigation project in Kedah, the state with the country's most commercialized rice economy.[117] And under the stewardship of Abdul Aziz bin Ishak, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives began to promote cooperatives to counter the stranglehold that Chinese Malaysian networks had on the post-independence rural economy. Under the ministry's program, hundreds of cooperative societies were opened.[118]

But the Tunku, as the PM was known, eyed Abdul Aziz with suspicion. Having been instrumental in the forging of the interethnic Alliance, the Tunku was protective of his delicate political creation. Although an electoral juggernaut, it was besieged by such sensitive communal matters as education and language instruction policy, citizenship rights, and special Malay privileges.[119] Irritated by Abdul Aziz's mounting belligerence toward Chinese traders and millers (and toward foreign investment more generally), in 1962 the PM dismissed the socialist-cum-populist minister from his cabinet, siding with the MCA in defense of its constituents' economic interests.[120] Abdul Aziz's ouster, and later jailing, was noted as a victory for the "powerful political lobby of capitalism" in the countryside.[121] The paucity of solvent cooperatives affirmed this characterization.[122] Nor could the Tunku politically afford to embark on major institutional innovations on behalf of paddy farmers. With the forging of patron–client relationships between UMNO elites and Malay landlords,

[115] Means 1970, pp. 216–17; Rudner 1975a; Stubbs 1989, chapter 8; Harper 1999, pp. 195–99, 359.
[116] Funston 1980, p. 60. [117] Doering 1973, pp. 90–93.
[118] IBRD 1955, pp. 80–88; Vorys 1975, pp. 230–34.
[119] Rudner 1975a; Jesudason 1990, p. 55; Heng 1988, pp. 254–61; Horowitz 2000, pp. 404–10; Cheah 2002, pp. 76–82; Slater 2010, p. 120.
[120] On his quarrel with the MCA finance minister over revoking trading licenses in Perak, see "Aziz: Tengku's Statement on Co-operatives' Big Losses 'Grossly Unfair'," *The Straits Times*, February 11, 1963.
[121] Fredericks and Wells 1983, p.148. See also Means (1970, pp. 196, 218–19); Toh and Jomo (1983, pp. 23–44). Ishak was jailed without trial (Abdul Aziz 1977).
[122] Vokes 1978, pp. 103–12.

land reform, for example, was a nonstarter. In short, Malay smallholders were left dependent on such stultifying government bureaucracies as RIDA and then Felda, rather than exposed to extrainstitutional galvanizing movements.

With Malay-Chinese income inequality on the rise during the first decade of independence, the federal government turned to some technocratic solutions, including tighter regulation of the postharvest system.[123] Study reports, like the aforementioned 1956 Rice Committee Report and those by external bodies such as the FAO, had been recommending the formation of such regulatory bodies to help rid the rice marketing system of some exploitative elements since the 1950s. Yet the Alliance government temporized until the publication of yet another external report and the restoration of its political clout with its resounding win at the 1964 polls.[124]

Finally, in 1965, the Malaysian government established the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA) as an initial step toward tackling Chinese domination in rice marketing.[125] Expectedly, Chinese traders accused it of aiming to destroy their livelihoods, which did not come to pass. FAMA's own field agents simply added a link to the marketing chain, which drove up prices further. In turn, FAMA charged the Commerce and Industry Ministry, an MCA domain, with obstruction and thus punitively ordered restrictions on domestic interstate rice shipments. Meanwhile, millers expressed alarm at the possibility of nationalization.[126] As we will see in Chapter 2, it took the dual shocks of the devastating ethnic riots in 1969 and the Green Revolution–led production spikes of paddy for some of these fears to be realized and for state intervention in the sector to become comprehensive and coercive.

Indonesia

Starting with the nineteenth century, as incidences of famine, disease, and warfare fell, population pressure on Java set it apart from the Malay Peninsula. In approximate terms, the island's population quadrupled to over 28 million from the mid-nineteenth century to 1900.[127] By 1930,

[123] Snodgrass 1980, pp. 66–83. Inequality among Malays was widening the swiftest.
[124] It was known as the Biggs Report (1964).
[125] The political entity was called Malaysia upon being granted independence in 1963.
[126] "We Won't Take Over Rice Mills, Says Again Mentri," *The Straits Times*, August 22, 1966; "Fama Doubts," *The Straits Times*, September 5, 1967.
[127] Nitisastro, 1970, pp. 5–6, 161; White 1973; Maddison 1989, table A-1, p. 663; Elson 1994, chapter 10.

Java's density was twelve times that of the Malay Peninsula.[128] And unlike the colonial Philippines, Java lacked a landed oligarchy that fused economic and political power. A Dutch statute of 1870 prohibited alienation of land held by Indonesians, which stymied extensive (legal) land consolidation by Chinese traders, colonial religious orders, or foreign companies. What bound these three colonies together, of course, was an impoverished peasantry chronically mired in debt and food insecurity.[129]

Motivated in part by unfulfilled moral obligations, in 1901, the Dutch instituted a package of reforms, collectively known as the Ethical Policy. Also seeking to reverse a downturn in rural welfare after decades of incremental improvement, these policies extended the reach of the colonial bureaucracy to the village level.[130] Initiatives opened educational opportunities, expanded health care facilities, and built a peoples' credit system. Village rice banks allowed cultivators to extend the storage of the paddy they intended to market, although the banks only marginally loosened ties of dependence on Chinese traders (and Arab) moneylenders.[131] Under the Ethical Policy, an agriculture department formed to build irrigation systems for wet-rice cultivation that had been mostly reserved for Java's sugar plantations.[132] Reforms also resulted in a series of data-laden reports, from which it was hoped administrators could pinpoint reasons for rural Java's immiseration.[133]

Lofty aims of the Ethical Policy were difficult to achieve. Colonial officials and scholars bemoaned the cultural deficiencies of the Javanese peasant for failure to improve his lot.[134] Meanwhile, as access to education broadened and reactions to international developments coalesced to spur an incipient movement of Indonesian nationalism, the Dutch responded to growing "radicalism" by jailing leaders of mass political organizations and labor unions. Others were exiled to malaria-infested camps in the colony's easternmost reaches.[135]

Soon thereafter, effects of the Great Depression in the Netherlands East Indies overwhelmed the Ethical Policy. The slump in export commodity prices decimated the thriving sugar industry; mills laid off

[128] Jack 1923, p. 3, table 1; Vandenbosch 1933, p. 17. [129] Oshima 1987, chapter 1.
[130] Maddison 1989, esp. p. 322.
[131] Hoover 1924, p. 15; Vandenbosch 1933, pp. 263–64; Furnivall 1939, pp. 46, 213, 357–58, 412–13; Boeke 1953, chapter 7; The 1989, esp. p. 168.
[132] Sugar firms entered into land leases of up to 21 years with village leadership. Despite reserved areas for paddy growing, sugar cultivation commonly breached restrictions.
[133] Valkenberg 1925, pp. 563–83; Vandenbosch 1933, p. 255; Geertz 1963; Prince 1989.
[134] Wertheim and The 1962; Cribb 1991, p. 243.
[135] Ingleson 1975, pp. 54–70; Mrazek 1994, chapters 5 and 6.

Javanese labor in droves.[136] By the 1930s, as on Luzon, Java's agricultural land frontier had closed, leading to a rise of landlessness and in soil erosion as peasants moved upland into ecologically sensitive areas.[137] The dire situation prompted the Dutch to abandon their largely *laissez-faire* approach and interfere in the rice industry.[138]

Officials scrambled to stabilize domestic rice prices in order to prevent a decline in the income of millions of cultivators. International prices had weakened owing to overproduction caused by the opening of new rice lands on mainland Southeast Asia. Instead of flooding the market with cheap imports, in contrast to past *laissez-faire* practices, Dutch officials required importers to obtain licenses before purchasing grain abroad. Accordingly, rice imports in the mid-1930s were cut to about half of the 500,000 tons per annum of a decade earlier.[139]

The Dutch also compelled Java's millers to sell their product to the government Food Supply Board (VMF), established in 1939 to regulate distribution and stabilize prices.[140] Similar to the two cases above, local rice prices were susceptible to wild seasonal swings. Yet, because of the greater number of dwarf-sized landholdings on Java, the island's marketing system was in deeper disarray and even more exploitative than in Malaya and in the colonial Philippines. By the 1930s, galvanized by the lifting of travel and residence restrictions, Chinese shopkeepers and itinerant traders steadily drove Javanese competitors out of business.[141]

Price stabilization policies incentivized some peasants to convert from planting sugar to rice. They also mitigated the risk in milling. In the 1920s, ethnic Chinese predominately owned over 200 rice mills on Java.[142] Margins had been small, until domestic prices fell closer to international levels due to a spurt in local supply, attracting more Chinese capital into the industry. Mills sprouted accordingly. Flush with cash, new millers wrestled control of domestic rice distribution from the large importing firms. The foremost importer was the Semarang-based Oei Tiong Ham Concern, the colony's largest ethnic Chinese conglomerate. Named after its founder, it expanded through its dominant position in the lucrative pre-WWI sugar and opium trade, although

[136] Rubber enterprises – corporate on the east coast of Sumatra, smallholder on the Dutch-held portion of Borneo – were also hit hard (Ladejinksy 1940, p. 554; Vries 1949).
[137] Eng 1996, pp. 144–46; Elson 1997, p. 120.
[138] Timmer 1975, p. 208; see also Prince (1989).
[139] Wickizer and Bennett 1941, p. 92; Kano 2008, p. 54, table 2–12a.
[140] In Dutch, Sticting Het Voedingsmiddelenfonds.
[141] Williams 1952, p. 55; Williams 1960, pp. 11–12; The 1989, pp. 172–73.
[142] Hoover 1924, p. 48.

rice milling and shipping featured among its operations.[143] In general, importers profited by exporting Java's high-grade rice and by bringing in lower-quality varieties.[144]

With more milling capacity, the uptick in supply pushed domestic prices downward. This allowed officials to purchase rice and distribute it to hospitals, prisons, and among police and the armed forces, as a type of price support program. And by shipping more rice to deficient areas in the Outer Islands, the sprawling colony's fragmented economy grew more integrated. Since it was cheaper for the Outer Islands to import foreign rice than buy from Java, the former was more dependent on imported rice than was the latter.[145]

Rural poverty on Java, however, persisted. Planters were reserving most of their harvest for home consumption because of food security and cultural reasons, and because gains from trade were accruing disproportionately to Chinese merchants. Although traders squeezed farm-gate prices, they too faced substantial risks, from storage to transportation, that were factored into retail prices. Consequently, urban demand for domestic rice slacked since its prices were often above that of imported varieties.[146]

Rural prosperity was equally hampered by the limited labor-absorption capacity of small-scale Javanese manufacturing firms. Millions toiled in the agricultural sector for pitiful wages, as the benefits of the production drive mostly passed them by. Large teams scoured the countryside in search of work, especially during peak harvest seasons.[147]

The land-owning cultivator may have gained somewhat from the production spike and official procurement. But with the shrinking of average plot sizes, he was planting less paddy, which meant less earning potential. Some income diversification via off-farm employment, coupled with maize and cassava cultivation as secondary crops, prevented a dramatic drop in welfare. The low figures for per capita rice consumption and overall caloric intake still revealed a slow, steady decline.[148]

[143] Cator 1936, p. 66; Godley 1973, pp. 52–53; Booth 1988, p.134; Onghokam 1989; Dick 1993; Eng 1996, pp. 182–86.
[144] Hoover 1924, p. 56; Panglaykim and Palmer 1970.
[145] Devlin, 1933, p. 2; Paauw 1963, p. 163; Sutter 1959, p. 12; Soen 1968 p. 44; Eng 1996, p. 183, pp. 184–85, table 4.7.
[146] The 1989; on urbanization figures in 1930, see Brand (1969, p. 308).
[147] Broek 1942, pp. 55–63; Boeke 1953, chapter 6; White 1983.
[148] Ladejinsky 1940, p. 527; Wickizer and Bennett 1941, p. 109; Polak 1943, p. 56, table 16.7; Soen 1968, pp. 45–46, table 50, pp. 51–52; Booth 1988, pp. 130–31; Boomgaard 1993.

More righteously than in Malaya and in the colonial Philippines, Indonesian nationalist leaders and organizations seized on the rural distress. They used it to condemn imperialism and colonialism and to showcase the diligent yet impoverished peasant as a symbol of the nationalist struggle and of the Indonesian desire to achieve freedom from economic exploitation and political oppression. By the 1930s, concern over rural alienation had become a critical intellectual and spiritual component of the movement. A 1933 pamphlet penned by its leading figure, Soekarno, was exemplary.[149] Over time, the future president mythically extolled and molded the ideas and ideals of self-sufficiency, socialism, populism, and a kind of indigenous Marxism into a loose ideology named after a smallholder, Marhaen. Soekarno had supposedly met him in Java's countryside. Particularly in Soekarno's words and speeches, Marhaen came to signify an agrarian, primordial Indonesian mindset that emphasized the unity and dignity of Indonesians and their quest for political and economic sovereignty.[150]

Other elements of the movement treated Soekarno's romanticism of a likely fictitious peasant based on a Javanese prototype with suspicion. Outer Island Islamic merchants put their faith in trade, and others preferred the pursuit of economic modernity through industrialization. There was strong support, nevertheless, for upholding traditional institutions and indigenous culture in policymaking in early independent Indonesia. The promotion of cooperatives as an anticapitalist alternative and as a precolonial expression of an authentic Indonesian identity and culture found considerable favor among elites.[151]

WWII to Soekarno's Fall

WWII brought disorder to Java's rice sector. Cultivators resented the forced requisitions of the Japanese and balked at boosting production since soaring inflation made a mockery of the official procurement price. Close to two million Javanese perished from starvation.[152]

When the Dutch returned in 1946, preceded by British forces, a turbulent politics of rice provisioning ensued. Until the launching of their military action in mid-1947, the Dutch controlled the cities without access to key agricultural areas. Indonesian republican leaders, however, feared that imposing a blockade might starve the two million or so

[149] Anderson 1966; Dahm 1969, p. 143.
[150] Soekarno 1957; Adams 1980 p. 75; Legge 2003, pp. 72–74, 132.
[151] Glassburner 1962; Robison 1986, pp. 28–29, 37–38; Henley 2007.
[152] Vries 1949; Sutter 1959, p. 300; Slumiers 1986; Sato 1994, chapter 6; Eng 2024.

Indonesians living in the port towns.[153] But developments on the ground proved chaotic and fluid. Rice seizures and lucrative smuggling across demarcation lines resulted in violence, even among republican troops, paramilitaries, and gang members from the same side of the anticolonial revolution. Meanwhile, the reliance of republican army commanders on Chinese traders for food provisions and other wartime materiel expedited mutually beneficial relations, which in cases prevailed for decades.[154]

The dynamics of Indonesia's four-year revolution against the Dutch provided further grist for the promotion of agrarianism nationalism. Much blood was spilled in rural Java, and Indonesians since have extolled the heroism of a young people's army comprised of village leaders, peasant recruits, and others in confronting the Japanese at the end of the occupation and then, through guerrilla struggle, in helping to defeat the returning Dutch army in securing the country's freedom. This exaltation – with elements of mythologizing that typically coalesce over time – has been used as a force to unify faction-ridden Indonesian society.[155]

Soon after Indonesia gained its independence in late 1949 – the final phase was achieved through negotiations – the central government formed a department in charge of food matters. The name of the initial agency was changed in 1952 to the Food Affairs Board (Yayasan Urusan Bahan Makanan, YUBM). In addition to having authority (on paper) over rice imports and the regulation of milling and pricing, YUBM went beyond the colonial example to supervise paddy cultivation as well. Growers detested YUBM's forced deliveries that were equated with Japanese tyranny. Indonesian officials also followed another Japanese wartime practice of steering procured subsidized rice into the hands of favored groups, notably the civil service and the armed forces.[156] Given their suspicion of private enterprise and a marketing system dominated by ethnic Chinese, policymakers dismissed liberalizing the rice sector to improve supply bottlenecks and other inefficiencies as a viable option. Most rice imports were sourced from Thailand and Burma, but also from the US via a short-lived forerunner of USAID, the Mutual Security Agency.[157]

Amid the turnover of cabinets during the 1950s, rice policy concentrated on cooperatives, fixed prices, and production programs. To plug

[153] Vu 2003. [154] Anderson 1966; Cribb 1991, pp. 77–78; Yong 2003, chapter 6.
[155] Anderson 1972, pp. 1–15, 252–54, 264–68, 308–09, 332–369; Reid 1974, pp. 49–57, 59–63, 151–53, 170–72; Lucas 1981, pp. 103–29, 166–87; Siegel 1997, pp. 208–30, 232; Fakih 2020, pp. 32–33.
[156] The key government regulation was No. 67 of 1951.
[157] Metcalf 1952, p. 41; Sutter 1959, p. 693; Anderson 1966; Timmer 1975; Vu 2003.

Figure 1.1 Heroes Monument/Peasant Statue. Idealization of the heroic peasant leading the defense of Indonesia's sovereignty in the face of external hostility is captured by a large bronze statue, officially named the Heroes Monument (*Patung Pahlawan*), situated in the middle of Jakarta. In the early 1960s, Soekarno ordered its erection. The Peasant Statue (*Tugu Tani*), as it is popularly known, portrays a muscular armed peasant on guard protecting the nation. His mother, in subordinate position, reaches upward to offer her son, the nation's hero, a bowl of rice. The statue's fitting caption reads: "Only a nation that exalts its heroes can become a great nation." ("*Hanya Bangsa Yang Menghargai Pahlawan Pahlawanja Dapat Menjadi Bangsa Jang Besar*"). (Credit/*Indonesia Window*)

shortfalls, YUBM supervised rice imports, while the Kian Gwan Concern organized the logistics, including delivery to YUBM warehouses for a commission. The Kian Gwan Concern was a subsidiary of the aforementioned Oei Tiong Ham Concern.[158]

In 1953, the more nationalist Wilopo cabinet broke up this (informal) monopoly by permitting an Indonesian rice traders' association and a group of Indonesian businessmen based in Bangkok to ship rice from Thailand. The Kian Gwan Concern still controlled imports from elsewhere.[159]

This arrangement lasted until the rice import business boomed. From 1956 to 1958, imports in volume tripled from their 1953 to 1955 level.[160] Indonesian firms lobbied the (second) Sastroamidjojo cabinet to introduce an open tender system. But it proved unwieldy and corruptible, and the succeeding cabinet nationalized the process by putting YUBM in charge.[161]

The rise in imports still proved inadequate, as Indonesia's production-consumption gap lingered due to a shortage of foreign exchange funds. Economic recovery from the devastation of the Japanese Occupation and ensuing revolution was challenging. The 1950–51 Korean War boom for the export of primary commodities was fleeting, and the need to fight Islamic-inspired insurgencies in West Java and in several locations in the Outer Islands siphoned public monies from development, as the Emergency did in Malaya. The political instability and ideological hostility to Western capitalism within nationalist and communist factions of government limited foreign direct investment.[162]

Even with domestic production returning to pre-WWII levels by 1956, on a per capita basis, it was down by some ten percent.[163] In response, the government sought to bolster procuring capacity. In 1957, it created the Paddy Purchasing Body (Badan Pembelian Padi, BPP) to buy harvests directly from Java's farmers. (YUBM's domestic operations were restricted to the Outer Islands.) BPP was frustrated by the foot-dragging of local civil servants. Over 90 percent of the domestic rice trade remained in private hands, a condition that endures to this day.[164]

Rice scarcity fed tensions over the provisioning policy for the civil service, the armed forces and police, and employees of state enterprises, ostensibly designed to protect their real incomes in a period of high

[158] Yoshihara 1989, p. 2. [159] Arifin 1994, pp. 32-33.
[160] Mears 1961, pp. 40–42; Arifin 1994, pp. 32–33. [161] Mears 1961, p. 42.
[162] Higgins 1957, pp. 109–10. [163] Mears 1961, p. 248, Table A-XIII-1.
[164] Mears 1961, p. 42; Sadli, Ismael, and Karidat 1961, pp. 411–12. In some publications BPP is referred to YBPP (Yayasan Badan Pembeli Padi).

inflation.[165] Employment in these sectors soared, or what Anderson describes as society's penetration of the porous state.[166] As a result, the central government was spending scarce resources on specialized distribution rather than on imports of chemical fertilizers to lift production, or on rice imports of sufficient quantities to build a stockpile from which reserves could be injected into the market during periods of price volatility.[167]

Three successive political bombshells further aggravated the rice sector. First, the 1957 nationalization of Dutch enterprises and assets threw inter-island shipping and supply chains into disarray. Second, in 1958, the rice-surplus province of West Sumatra rebelled against the central government. And, similar to what Philippine governments had tried, in 1959, the Indonesian government barred ("alien") Chinese from retail trade in rural areas, disrupting the grain's distribution network. The country's rice dilemma contributed to a general rise in societal unrest, especially by labor, whose purchasing power was being eroded by soaring rice prices. Debates over averting a rice famine roiled parliament.[168]

Against this backdrop, President Soekarno's political power was on the rise, as his incipient authoritarian Guided Democracy regime supplanted the country's messy yet democratic parliamentary order. Seeking to put Marhaenism into practice, Soekarno focused on overcoming the country's food dilemma (surprising enough, given his legendary disdain for policy planning). His speeches of the 1950s had provocatively elevated the issue of achieving self-sufficiency in rice to a matter of "life or death" (*hidup-matinya*) for the young nation.[169]

His three-year plan (1959–62) marshalled human and material resources into hundreds of paddy centers of about 1000 hectares each across Java. Some centers showed progress, with farmers using state credit to purchase chemical fertilizers. Yet wayward implementation, insufficient resources, embezzlement of fertilizers and seeds, scant extension services, and low procurement prices that dulled cultivators' incentives doomed the project. The low prices farmers were offered ensured the meager repayment of fertilizer loans, which starved the centers of

[165] Humphrey, Walter, David, et al., 1963, p. 5. [166] Anderson 1983.
[167] Mears 1957; Sadli, Ismael, and Karidat 1961, pp. 432–33; Feith 1963; Mubyarto 1975, p. 89, table 3.
[168] "Indonesia Alert to a Rice Famine," *New York Times*, December 21, 1957; Feith 1962, p. 564; Paauw 1963, p. 166; Mackie 1976.
[169] Famously uttered in an April 27, 1952 speech at the Agriculture Faculty of the University of Indonesia in Bogor (See megapolitan.antaranews.com; last accessed October 30, 2025).

financing, and the dry weather of 1961 and 1963 exposed the degeneration of Java's irrigation systems. With population growth over two percent per annum and with many planters switching to more profitable crops like tobacco, Indonesia was importing 20 to 30 percent more rice after the paddy centers experiment than prior.[170]

By 1961, imports breached the psychological barrier of one million tons and remained above that level for another three years. The costliest item on the country's import bill, these foreign deliveries were now accounting for some 20 percent of the domestic rice supply. Soekarno's chief minister, Djuanda Kartawidjaja, described the situation as shameful for a rice-growing nation. But the gross economic mismanagement of Djuanda's government contributed to the dwindling of foreign reserves and tax revenues.[171] Overcoming the country's deficiency in rice output, and cultivator impoverishment, would require more grit than mythology.

With tight military controls on the movement of rice and with rations distributed to the state sector, even the supply of tens of millions of dollars of rice aid under the US's Public Law 480 surplus program in 1962 and 1963 failed to prevent widespread hunger and chronic malnutrition.[172] Widening rice price differentials across regions indicated a fragmentation of the official trade. A thriving black market in rice was both cause and effect of the deteriorating situation.[173]

The country slipped into a foreign reserve and debt crisis. Soekarno had severed diplomatic relations with the US, which reduced Indonesia's volume of foreign aid, and had broken off relations with Singapore and Malaysia on account of Confrontation, sapping Indonesia of its export earnings. In his Independence Day speech of August 1964, Soekarno urged compatriots to consume more tubers and root crops as rice substitutes.[174] Soon thereafter, his government: 1) banned rice imports to save scarce foreign reserves; 2) abolished the official procurement program to incentivize farmers to expand production since private

[170] Sadli, Ismael, and Karidat 1961, p. 22; Mackie 1967, pp. 33–34; Brand 1969; Hawes 1970, p. 7; Hansen 1971; Utrecht 1973, pp. 150–51, table 2.

[171] Paauw 1963, p. 188; Gibson 1965, p. 46; Sutjipto 1968, p. 22, table 2.1; Palmer 1976, pp. 13, 15, table 8.

[172] PL 480 was passed in 1956 by the Johnson administration; the first recipient of nonmilitary grain surplus aid was India. This Food for Peace Program enabled US farmers to grow prodigious amounts of wheat and corn (Cullather 2010, pp. 142–46).

[173] Sadli, Ismael, and Karidat 1961, pp. 412, 423–24; Kroef 1963; "Robert Kennedy to Visit Sukarno; Attorney General Appointed by Johnson to Discuss Hostility to Malaysia," *New York Times*, January 14, 1964; Eng 2015.

[174] "Sukarno Presses Corn as Food Aid," *New York Times*, July 27, 1964; "Survey of Recent Developments," 1966.

traders commonly offered higher prices; and 3) substituted some portions of the specialized rice rations with corn and cash.[175]

Before bringing this chapter to a close, two final developments that influenced Soeharto's succeeding New Order regime and its approach to sectoral development warrant mention. To overcome the dearth of skilled field personnel, the College of Agriculture of the University of Indonesia led a pilot program in West Java that deployed university students as extension field agents. By living in the villages, they gained the trust of farmers, and in cases 50 percent increases in yield growth were recorded. Success led to the program's roll-out across Java. Yet past problems remained. Limited trained personnel, diversion of pricey inputs, shortage of affordable production credit, unreliable irrigation, and low farm-level purchase prices numbered among them. Nevertheless, the intensification program – a subsequent version would be known as Bimas (Bimbangan Massal or Mass Guidance) – would form a vital pillar of the New Order government's Green Revolution production schemes. Crucially, it demonstrated the possibility of raising output without undertaking land reform.[176]

Land redistribution was an incendiary matter, and Soeharto's soon-to-be regime rose to power on its violent negation. In 1960, under Soekarno's Guided Democracy regime, Parliament passed a controversial Basic Agrarian Law (BAL). In many respects, it was the legal manifestation of clause 33(3) of the 1945 Constitution championing a democratic economy, where the country's resources and production would contribute to the prosperity of the Indonesian people.

Seeking to extirpate absentee landlordism, the BAL limited land ownership by distributing two hectares of either dry or irrigated land to each nuclear family in rural Java. Surveys showed that villages with three-quarters of the population without land were common and that average landholding sizes, already well below 1.0 hectare, were trending downward. Land inequality on Java, while appreciable, was less acute than on Central Luzon, however. Roughly 6.5 million of Java's 8 million farms were below 1.0 hectare; yet, only about 34,000 were over five. Coupled with relentless population pressure and a closed land frontier, Java was simply not large enough to fulfill the BAL's redistributive target, which had also mandated a cap of five hectares of irrigated farmland for the island.[177]

[175] Mubyarto and Fletcher 1966, pp. 10, 14; Mackie 1967, p. 94 (n. 18).
[176] Roekasah and Penny 1967; Rieffel 1969; Hawes 1970, pp. 7–8; Fryer 1971, p. 315; Palmer 1976, pp. 25–28.
[177] Pelzer 1945, pp. 126–30; Soemardjan 1962; Kroef 1963; Brand 1969; Fryer 1971, pp. 314–15.

The Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) pushed land reform. Backed by millions of members and millions more in affiliated organizations such as the Indonesian Peasants' Front (Barisan Tani Indonesia, BTI), the PKI threw its support behind the BAL (and a sharecropping law was also passed in 1960). Rural landlords opposed the BAL, as did local government officials. They, along with local land reform committees, mostly ignored its provisions. Beginning in late 1963 and early 1964, PKI and BTI cadres began seizing land, including parcels of absentee landlords. Clashes broke out in Central Java and East Java between occupiers and anticommunist forces, especially youth paramilitaries affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama, a powerful Islamic political party. The escalation in tensions and violent conflict over the BTI's and PKI's unilateral actions, endorsed by Soekarno in his 1964 Independence Day speech, crucially set the stage for one of the twentieth century's greatest politicides and the emergence of General Soeharto's New Order regime.[178]

Conclusion

Under conditions of late colonialism, the politics of rice was consequential, as this chapter demonstrated across the three cases. This politics was structured by factors emanating from the rice sector. Rapid population growth placed heavy pressure on food supply and land availability, and as frontiers progressively narrowed, labor productivity in paddy cultivation stagnated. So too did yield growth, after some improvement owing to limited modern irrigation expansion. But prices of chemical fertilizers remained beyond the means of the average planter, many of whom also balked at investing in their plots since they were trapped in debt relationships with Chinese traders or landlords who would benefit disproportionately from increased paddy production. Production for household consumption prevailed over marketing surplus rice. So, peasants remained poor, and families often starved when harvests were compromised due to drought or when supply was scarce during the hungry season prior to the main harvest, as traders hoarded supplies to push up prices and increase profits. Meanwhile, from rubber to sugar, colonial officials paid profitable export crops more attention than import-competing cereals. They were of the belief that rice could be purchased on the regional market to make up for local deficits, but this policy produced mixed consequences. With wide price differentials between exporting

[178] Lyon 1970, sections 5 and 6; Huizer 1972; Mortimer 1974, chapter 7; Robinson 1995, chapters 10 and 11.

countries and importing entities, corruption inside and outside official channels (in the form of smuggling) was rampant. State intervention was the main policy approach, although in crucial fashion it was pursued with little success. Certainly, pride in paddy production by state elites had not coalesced as a contributing factor.

The politics of rice also remained unassailably consequential because of the different ways its forms affected national politics. Colonial officials and post-independence elites alike feared rural instability and unrest. In each colony-turned-country, officials saw rural discontent lurking behind destabilizing violence, from horizontal Chinese–Malay violence on the Malay Peninsula during the Emergency, the Huk rebellion on Luzon, and growing Communist ascendency, especially on Java. Soekarno and other nationalist leaders, more than local elites elsewhere, showcased the peasantry as the ideological epicenter of Indonesian nationhood to ward off exogenous, polluting, and threatening forces. Malay and Filipino elites occupied positions of landowners and politicians competing in elections who sought to use the peasantry for their own purposes, though in distinctly non-Communist ends. But over time, this worry over an upswing in Communist power, and over rural poverty in general, implicated Western officials. Through greater local cereal production, they wished to cauterize rural leftist revolution, the lens through which they viewed the escalation of violence in Indochina. They turned to experimental yet expensive science to boost rice cultivation in order to achieve non-Communist stability in partnership with conservative, capitalist-friendly local regimes, whose own power and legitimacy needed boosting as well. As we will see in Chapter 2, the Green Revolution would accomplish these aims, although neither seamlessly nor efficiently.

2 The Green Revolution
Performance Success

Miracle rice brings new hope to Asia.

Manila Times, April 17, 1967

On balance, opinions remain divisive on the Green Revolution. Standard criticisms, as surveyed in this book's Introduction, continue to circulate. Even steadfast Green Revolution proponents, who champion the program's achievement in having avoided Malthusian development debacles, presently recognize the environmental toll the project exacted. In response, these development economists today implore a much-needed second Green Revolution, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, to be greener in design and implementation. Others recommend shifting objectives from enhancing production to advancing nutritional goals in many parts of Asia, too.[1]

Even so, garlanding the Green Revolution with acclaim has gained momentum. One study from 2021 estimates that from 1960 to 2000 it generated an astounding US$80 trillion in development benefits globally, by slowing population rates as a result of rising rural incomes in Asia and Latin America.[2] A preeminent agricultural economist and a respected historical geographer in separate books conclude that superior pro-poor development outcomes in Southeast Asia in large part are attributable to the success of the Green Revolution between that region and sub-Saharan Africa.[3] And two anthropologists who had written suspiciously of the Green Revolution's effects on the Malaysian countryside have come to accept, if not begrudgingly, the salutary structural changes in society it triggered.[4]

These structural changes did not happen in a vacuum, nor were they frictionless. This chapter acknowledges the protracted struggles behind the Green Revolution's implementation, including pervasive corruption

[1] Conway 1998; Coxhead 2000; Jikun, Pray, and Rozelle 2002; Pingali 2012; Habito 2016; Bouis and Saltzman 2017.
[2] Gollin, Hansen, and Wingender 2021.
[3] Henley 2015; Timmer 2015. See also Pinstrup-Andersen and Watson (2011, p. 16).
[4] Koninck and Raiha 2012; Bray 2014, esp. p. 20.

and rent-seeking that threatened the project's advances. By not bracketing the mistakes, miscues, and unintended consequences that accompanied the enormous program, I maintain that its successes can be shown in a less blinkered or ideological fashion. By scrutinizing the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, this chapter covers less historical ground than Chapter 1 did, but significantly, it distills the momentousness of the Green Revolution in Southeast Asia's recent history. It is central to this book's argument to present the Green Revolution as a critical juncture. This chapter provides that empirical evidence. The program opened opportunities to insert agency, and uncertainty, in unexpected ways that upended deeply rooted structures and ushered in sweeping changes. In recounting these conflict-ridden processes, we must retain focus on the steep challenges implementers faced in their pursuit of affecting institutional change, much realized by the massive mobilization of financial aid by the West and by the risks the region's smallholders surmounted in adapting to the new technology. Gradually, assuming a new sociopolitical identity of production nationalist, certain state elites claimed much of this complicated project's success to be theirs, injecting in them sizable well-springs of pride.

Chapter 2 highlights that, amid social and political turmoil, Green Revolution success altered established development and political paths in the countries where the new technology was applied thoroughly. Significant progress was made on poverty reduction, as increases in cultivation raised agricultural incomes and spawned opportunities for rural households to bolster off-farm income. This chapter notes the structural transformation the three economies underwent (with such discussions spilling over in the national case chapters that comprise Part II).

Alongside development progress, this chapter stresses that tackling the rice question via the Green Revolution was fundamental in buttressing the power of conservative, pro-West, centralizing regimes that supervised their respective national production programs. Strengthened provisioning capacities through domestic cultivation and imports, both of which were appreciably funded by Western donors, prolonged the staying power of President Marcos in the Philippines, President Soeharto in Indonesia, and UMNO in Malaysia. Each of these regimes fixated on bettering their control of bolstered rice supplies; this included the unprecedented granting of the crucial import monopoly license to parastatals. Coercive governing capacities undergirded by unrivaled rice provision, compared to the past (Chapter 1), kept alternative visions of national policies, as represented by Communist forces in the Philippines and Indonesia and Islamist aspirations in Malaysia, from advancing. The wider availability of the grain and the concomitant development headway

made in rural society lent the legitimacy that was critical to these increasingly centralizing authoritarian regimes. Through remarkable paddy production, rice politics helped to anchor these regimes in their societies in unprecedented fashion. Their durability is appreciated when addressing their rice predicaments and how they were overcome. This chapter begins with the case of the Philippines, followed by Malaysia, and concludes with that of Indonesia.

The Philippines

In 1965, presidential hopeful Ferdinand Marcos of the Nacionalista Party faced the onslaught of cheap rice imports ordered by his opponent, Liberal Party incumbent President Diosdado Macapagal. Macapagal's purchases were intended to curry favor with urban voters ahead of the election. To turn incumbent scheming to his advantage, Marcos pledged to rejuvenate the rice sector with a large-scale production program.[5] In the run-up to the election, rice prices did not fall as Macapagal had intended, and Marcos prevailed, thereby continuing the pattern of the presidency alternating between the Liberal and Nacionalista parties as it had in the post-WWII era.

Surprisingly, Marcos delivered on his campaign pledge, initiating what was officially called the Rice Self-Sufficiency Production Program during his first administration (1965/6-69). It was unforeseen, because as we saw in Chapter 1, national policymaking tended to favor either the rural elite or the urban sector. As remarkable, the program succeeded in large part because of the active role played by the much-maligned Philippine state, an entity long chided for its ineptitude in pursuit of purported development goals.[6]

Marcos took advantage of circumstances. By the early 1960s, rural radicalism experienced a temporary lull, and the Ford and Rockefeller foundations had completed the building of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), located some 75 kilometers south of the capital Manila. IRRI's plant breeders and scientists were testing fertilizer-responsive, fast-maturing varieties to increase yields and double-cropping opportunities within a single planting year. US officials hoped that IRRI and its MVs could help overcome chronic hunger across Asia, diffuse rural discontent, and dampen Communist sympathies. In the Philippines, the land frontier also had been exhausted, and a rapid

[5] "Rice: Key to Development," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 20, 1967, pp. 129–34; Iglesias 1977.

[6] This literature is reviewed by Takagi (2016, pp. 1–21).

conversion of rice and corn lands to export crops, on account of the IMF- and World Bank-supported 1962 devaluation (Chapter 1), added to the country's food woes. The acreage devoted to food crops was declining, especially on a per capita basis given the country's robust population growth. Filipino and American officials believed that the acuteness of the country's food dilemma would imperil social stability, and that continued reliance on the international market for rice was risky and costly. Resources were instead marshalled to boost rice productivity on a mass scale.[7] In the Philippines (and elsewhere), it was long recognized what components were necessary – improved varietals, modern irrigation facilities, expert extension services, and higher farmgate prices. But supportive public finance always lacked.[8] Remarkably, this constraint was on the verge of being lifted.

In cooperation with the Bureau of Plant Industry and the University of the Philippines College of Agriculture, IRRI's experimental cross-breeding of two semidwarf varieties, combined with the application of chemical fertilizers and controlled water management, showed impressive results. Marcos seized the opportunity to realize his campaign pledge. In mid-1966, his administration pressed IRRI to distribute some "miracle seeds" prematurely. (IRRI officials believed more testing was needed). In early 1967, wide release followed. The Philippine state, with substantial financial and technical assistance from the US, was embarking on one of its most impressive development efforts.[9]

Sidelining the corrupt and largely ineffectual Rice and Corn Administration (RCA), Marcos revived a government body, the Rice and Corn Production Coordinating Council (RCPCC), that had languished under President Macapagal. The appointment of Marcos's capable executive secretary, Rafael Salas, to head the RCPCC, and not someone from agricultural-related departments, marked the gravity that the president accorded his production program.[10] As the second most powerful civilian in Marcos's government, Salas and his decision-making prowess quelled the interagency squabbles and subdued the rent-seeking of past agricultural development programs. Salas cancelled the rice imports ordered by the RCA that were opportunistically planned to arrive prior to the 1967 mid-term elections.[11]

[7] Golay and Goodstein 1967; Barker 1985, pp. 194–96; Cullather 2010, chapters 6 and 9.
[8] Virata 1949. In Malaya, see Federation of Malaya (1953, 1956).
[9] On the seeds' premature release, "RP Rice Unfit (to Eat Outside RP)," *The Manila Times*, December 17, 1967; see also Palmer (1975, p. 15).
[10] Critically, at this juncture the production nationalist identity had not yet emerged.
[11] Salas 1985, pp. 110–11.

To actualize the RCPCC's chief goal of achieving rice self-sufficiency, the provision of ample resources was decisive. USAID funded the widespread distribution of the demonstration kits that contained the new Green Revolution technology – MVs and chemical fertilizers – to farmers, and the training of extension service agents to instruct cultivators on the use of the new inputs. The World Bank financed the construction of the country's largest irrigation system, which opened in mid-1967 in Bulacan province of Central Luzon.[12] Marcos, meanwhile, committed his administration's resources to the program. From 1966 to 1970, average annual expenditure on agricultural development was one-quarter higher than the average of the five previous years. The official procurement price of unhusked rice (*palay*) was also raised, up from P12.5 per kilogram to not less than P16.0.[13]

Cultivators responded to the price incentive, especially in Central Luzon, Laguna, and other areas with modern irrigation facilities. But officials were concerned that poorer farmers reliant on rain-fed systems might reject the new technology either due to its cost or "peasant conservatism." Results proved otherwise. While the Green Revolution technology did not spread evenly, it was adopted with little appreciable difference among share tenants, lessees, and owner-operators and at an overall rate that surpassed most predictions.[14]

Returns were unmistakable. From 1965/66 to 1969/70, yields improved from about 1300 kilograms per hectare to almost 1700, with nearly half the (lowland) farmers planting MVs.[15] The surge in output caught policymakers off guard; they could not construct storage facilities fast enough. Marcos's government was forced to sell a modest surplus abroad for a loss. Some import deals were cancelled, others could not be because of existing contracts.[16] In his 1968 State of the Union Address (SONA), Marcos proudly declared that the country's achievement "in a time of declining rice production in most countries has elicited the admiration of the whole world." In a subsequent SONA, he associated soaring harvests with uplifting the nation's self-esteem.[17] This included that of Filipino farmers, whose income rose but not at consumer expense since real rice prices trended downwards.[18]

The violence, fraud, and distribution of massive illicit campaign funding characteristic of Marcos's reelection of 1969 loom large in

[12] "UN Experts Visit Irrigation Project in Bulacan (Bustos)," *The Manila Times*, April 26, 1967; Smith 1988, p. 160.
[13] RCA 1965/66; Palmer 1975, chapter 2; Barker, 1985, p. 199, table 5.
[14] RCA 1969; Mangahas, Miralao, and Reyes 1976, pp. 6–9, chapter 3.
[15] Barker 1985, p. 196, table 2. [16] RCA 1967/68; Latham 2024, p. 36.
[17] SONA 1968, 1969. [18] Mangahas 1975; Herdt 1987, pp. 343–44, table 7.

standard analyses.[19] The more mundane achievement of obtaining rice self-sufficiency, however, should not be overlooked. It lent credence to Marcos's campaign slogans in which rice featured prominently and which buttressed his reputation as a "can do" president. Food-crop advances improved his chance of doing what no Philippine president had done before him – secure reelection.[20] Marcos's success in rice production denied him the opportunity of flooding the local market with cheap imports, as his predecessors had done. He flooded the country instead with cheap money by raiding the state treasury.

The calamity of Marcos's tactics and reelection sent the country into turmoil: Incidents of urban violence spiked, as did government deficits, which initiated a foreign exchange crisis. Weakened rice cultivation put pressure on rice prices and spurred concerns over inflation.[21] This decline in output in part resulted from a series of unusually devastating natural disasters between 1970 and 1973 – an exceptional typhoon (Yoling), a once-in-a-generation flood in Central Luzon, drought in the south, and an epidemic of the plant disease tungro, caused in the main by the widespread monocropping of the popular MV known as IR-8. The latter showed that unintended problems with the Green Revolution technology were adding to the country's food woes.

Challenges mounted. Salas resigned his post in protest over government corruption, and the 1970 devaluation of the peso once more favored agro-export commodities over food crops. Even Marcos, the production nationalist, used the natural calamities as cover to import nearly a half-million tons of rice prior to the mid-term elections of late 1971.[22] And as rice scarcity intensified the violence that wracked Manila, Marcos broke the country's political impasse in September 1972 by declaring a state of emergency. His Martial Law regime ushered in a decade and half of repressive authoritarianism and eventually precipitated national economic meltdown.

Marcos tried to offset political repression with economic redistribution to the masses. Land reform was intended to be a cornerstone of his "New Society" and lend legitimacy to the new regime in the eyes of Filipinos and the international community. As outlined in Presidential Decree 27, the program was announced a month after Marcos's Martial Law proclamation. Known as Operation Land Transfer (OLT), it contained

[19] Anderson 1988; de Quiros 1997, pp. 65–68; Abinales and Amoroso 2005, p. 198; Slater 2010, pp. 124–26.
[20] Abueva 1970; Salas 1985, p. 93; Tadem 1986; Smith 1988, pp. 178–79.
[21] Baldwin 1975, pp. 151–52; Doronila 1992, pp. 153–56; Abinales and Amoroso 2005, p. 198.
[22] Mangahas 1975; Palmer 1975, pp. 31, 187.

elements of prior efforts but expanded their reach by declaring the whole country a land reform area. It also lowered the retention limit from 25 to 7 acres. Unlike past presidents, Marcos at first allocated sizable resources to land reform.[23]

Marcos used the OLT as a political reward and weapon. He excluded lands planted to export commodities, benefiting his cronies in the sector. This exemption hastened the conversion of land into the cultivation of cash crops to capture gains from devaluation and to avoid government expropriation. The OTL was also intended to undermine the landed elites who might oppose the dictator's grand political ambitions. Some did obstruct the reforms by contesting tenants' claims through the ponderous judicial system and by subdividing land plots below the retention limit with ownership transferred to family members. Yet Marcos's administration discovered that many large landlords had diversified from agriculture, replaced to an extent by moderate-sized, middle-class landowners, including civil servants. Because they turned out not to be the elites that could threaten Marcos's regime, funding for the program declined steadily.[24] While the regime championed the hundreds of thousands of tenants who were participating in the drawn-out administrative and financial process of becoming land owners, only tens of thousands ever gained this status. Tens of thousands more at least improved their station by becoming leaseholders with fixed rents. The same could not be said for the millions of landless agricultural workers who were excluded from the OLT from the outset. Although land reform did lead to an increase in the landless, as tenants were evicted from their lands, the program softened the hard edge of rural radicalism.[25]

While equity concerns arguably motivated Marcos to implement land reform, his second major Martial Law policy innovation on rural development, known as Masagana 99, returned the dictator's focus to rice productivity.[26] The regional rice crisis of 1972 and 1973 and the world oil crisis that drove up fertilizer prices had exacerbated the country's food problems. That in 1973 the regime struggled mightily to meet its import target, Masagana 99 constituted Marcos's response to the rice crises of the country and the region.[27]

Masagana 99 deviated from Marcos's first rice production program. RCPCC was replaced by the National Food and Agricultural Council

[23] Murray 1972; Wurfel 1977, p. 2; Putzel 1992, pp. 113, 117, 123–27, 136.
[24] Mangahas 1975; Wurfel 1977, p. 10; Ofreneo 1987, p. 67.
[25] Fegan 1983; Kerkvliet 1990, pp. 4–6, 29–34; Putzel 1992, pp. 137–39.
[26] *Masagana* means "bountiful" in Tagalog; 99 refers to target yields in cavans (about 4.4 tons of paddy per hectare).
[27] SONA 1973; NGA 1974.

(NFAC), whose remit was now expanded to other crops. While the RCPCC was a victim of its success, the RCA was a victim of its own failure. Unable to secure adequate supplies in 1971, it was dissolved and superseded by a new state food marketing agency, the National Grains Authority (NGA).[28]

The mechanisms of this production campaign furthermore differed slightly. Whereas the former RCPCC-led program centered on farmer adoption of the Green Revolution technology, Masagana 99 focused on the provision of adequate credit. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides were expensive, and their costs had increased fourfold during the 1970s.[29] Moreover, as land reform in part was severing the dependence of the tenant on the landlord, the tenant's traditional source of loans (despite the usury inherent in the exchange) was drying up. Officials thus rushed to ascertain that institutional credit was readily available. Backed by USAID loans, they poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the rural banking system for distribution to small-scale producers. Complementary agencies, FACOMAs and the Agricultural Credit Association, served as mediators between local bankers and producers. Masagana 99 proved to be a massive transfer of income to the rural sector, lessening the inequality between it and its urban counterpart. Rural bankers profited immensely, since the central bank guaranteed these noncollateralized, low-interest loans, and political pressure spurred reckless lending; Marcos's New Society needed a big win, so to speak. Repayment rates were abysmal since the money was interpreted by many farmers as gifts rather than loans.[30]

Although plagued by leaks – some funds were diverted to the sugar industry – and financially profligate, Masagana 99 stimulated growth comparable to that of the earlier RCPCC-led program. Yields nearly doubled to about 75 *cavans* per hectare, and MV usage reached about 90 percent of farmers. Meanwhile, the NGA's procurement rates were two to three times higher than earlier in the decade.[31] The NGA also managed grain price crises responsibly, becoming "the most important and strategic grain trader in the country."[32] By 1977, the country once again declared itself self-sufficient in rice, even recommencing limited exports. Accolades for the Agriculture Department, headed by Arturo

[28] "RCA Revamp Begins," *The Manila Times*, September 10, 1972; Palmer 1975, pp. 28–34; Clarete 2008. Ricob (chapter 1) was dissolved into the NGA.
[29] Tadem 1986, pp. 22–23.
[30] Bello, Kinley, and Elinson 1982, pp. 78–80; Smith 1988, pp. 160–61; Boyce 1993, pp. 143–45; Hayami and Kikuchi 2000, pp. 33–34.
[31] Mangahas 1975; Hayami and Kikuchi, 1978; Herdt 1987; Wurfel 1988, pp. 172–73.
[32] Clarete 2008, p. 178.

R. Tanco Jr., and the NGA Administrator, Jesus Tanchanco, poured in.[33] Even as the years passed, President Marcos continued to look back at these achievements with admiration. In the early 1980s, he filled his speeches with references to the pride he and the country associated with achieving self-sufficiency.[34]

Like the RCPCC program beforehand, Masagana 99 proved unsustainable. The hundreds of thousands of tons of foreign rice entering the country annually by the early to mid-1980s stood as evidence. As the boom-and-bust cycle was replayed from earlier years, so too were its causes. Typhoons and droughts reprised their destructive role in the turnabout. As for non-weather-related impediments, the adverse movement in the fertilizer-to- rice price ratio hurt the farmers' material interests. (This was the key price ratio for boosting production in a Green Revolution-technological framework.) In Central Luzon from 1966 to 1979, the share of material inputs in total costs more than tripled. As fertilizer prices spiraled, rice prices fell domestically and internationally because of Green Revolution-induced excess output. Even when periods of low supply led to rice price spikes, marketing margins grew wider, and traders gained at the expense of producers. As a result, farmers' income suffered, and credit defaults rose sharply.[35]

The late Marcos period was also characterized by the heightening of grand corruption and the decay of institutional capacity. The replacement of the NGA by a new body, the National Food Authority (NFA), was exemplary. With Marcos's wife, Imelda, helming the NFA,[36] its remit was expanded from grains to food, and the government proceeded to inject billions of pesos into this new tax-exempt parastatal that amounted to some two percent of gross national product each year. The NFA also had its bonds and foreign credit guaranteed, which sparked a lending frenzy by international banks. And as international and domestic rice prices began to diverge considerably, the new agency made millions in windfall profits, especially through imports. The lavish rents were shared among the dictator's and the First Lady's cronies and were also used to pay the salaries of the NFA's bloated staff.[37]

The direness of the situation pressed Marcos to introduce what would become his final cultivation scheme. His Intensified Rice Production Program produced a record harvest of 5.4 million metric tons in 1985.

[33] Clarete 2008; Ricks 2017. [34] Marcos 1981; Marcos 1982.
[35] David 1985; Tadem 1986, pp. 22–33; Ofreneo 1987, pp. 69, 82–83; Boyce 1993, pp. 25–26, 116, table 2.7; Bello 2009, p. 56.
[36] Imelda headed the NFA Council via her capacity as minister of the newly formed Ministry of Human Settlements (NFA 1981).
[37] NFA 1981; Amelina 2004.

The amount of cheap credit the program disbursed, however, was "only about 15 percent in real terms of what was disbursed at the peak of the Masagana-99 program in 1974." This expenditure shortfall was caused by macroeconomic weakness characterized by problems of "balance of payments, foreign debt, inflation, and public deficit problems confronting the nation."[38] As tepid industrial and manufacturing growth was unable to absorb urban and rural labor, Marcos's government turned to exporting its workforce in great numbers, especially to partake in the oil-driven construction bonanzas of the Middle East.[39] When massive peaceful street protests in early February 1986 finally forced the Marcoses into exile, nearly a million metric tons of rice sat in government warehouses.[40] No wonder that newer interpretations of food security emphasize *access* to food as much as availability.[41]

Malaysia

In the mid-1960s, in collaboration with IRRI, Malaysia's Department of Agriculture began introducing a series of MVs whose grain quality and pest resistance improved with time. Work had also begun on a large irrigation project, including two sizable dams, in the Muda River area of the northwestern states of Kedah and Perlis. A loan of M$135 million (approximately US$45 million) from the lending arm of the World Bank, the International Bank of Rehabilitation and Development, financed almost two-thirds of the project's construction cost. In 1970, a government agency, the Muda Agricultural Development Authority (MADA), whose head "had direct access to the highest reaches of government," was established to oversee the project.[42] At approximately 95,000 hectares, it accounted for about one-quarter of the country's wet-rice acreage and encompassed some 50,000 farming households. By 1975, the Muda scheme was in near full operation, with 93 percent of its area double-cropping paddy.[43]

Increases in production, made possible with improved water control and the use of MVs, were rapid and striking. In the early 1970s, helped by a doubling of yields from the 1950s, the off-season crop comprised forty percent of the country's total output, compared with just five percent in 1962.[44] Total production, which had averaged 879,000 tons

[38] David 1985, p. 7. [39] Hayami and Kikuchi 2000, p. 40. [40] Bello 2009, p. 56.
[41] Pinstrup-Andersen and Watson 2011, chapter 4.
[42] Bell, Hazell, and Slade 1982, p. 26.
[43] Ouchi, Saeki, Takahashi, et al. 1977, p. 60; Vokes 1978, p. 38; Shimomoto 1980.
[44] Goldman 1975; Vokes 1978, p. 40, table 2.10; Ouchi, Saeki, Takahashi, et al. 1977, p. 38; Taylor, Noh, and Hussein 1980, p. 4; Fredericks and Wells 1983, p. 5, table 1.2.

of paddy annually from 1960 to 1966, rose some 88 percent, or 1.65 million tons, on average from 1970 to 1975.[45] Despite naysayers,[46] the willingness of Malaysian growers to adapt to the new technology enabled the government to meet its rice self-sufficiency target of 90 percent under the Second Malaysia Plan (1971–75). For the subsequent five-year plan (1976–80), 92 percent of a 100 percent target was fulfilled.[47] Because of the production success, Prime Minister Abdul Razak Hussein insisted that producers deserved the respect of society and be referred to as "gentlemen farmers."[48]

Even though rice only contributed five percent to the country's GDP, the government continued to invest heavily in the sector. In the First Malaysia Plan (1966–70), over 35 percent of the development expenditure on agriculture was budgeted for irrigation. By the Third Malaysia Plan (1976–80), in absolute dollars, the M$778.6 million budget was more than twice the size of that allocated in the first plan.[49] Public spending also included generous production subsidies: Muda's planters paid only about one-third of the estimated real costs of irrigation services per acre per year and about three-quarters of the costs of nitrogenous fertilizers from 1966 to 1970.[50] Subsequently, officials introduced and scrapped a number of credit and price support programs, as the price of urea fluctuated wildly. On the whole, rice growers responded positively to these price discounts. Between 1970 and 1982, the use of chemical fertilizers more than doubled per hectare of arable land.[51]

Even with the subsidies, the application of pricey inputs, including imported pesticides and herbicides, required agriculturalists to use more cash than previously. As the production loan for farmers was becoming larger and more important than the off-season loan for consumption, the government stepped in. It established institutional channels to supply the cash and credit needed by producers, since they were exceeding the means of the average Chinese shopkeeper or paddy dealer who had served as the farmers' lender of first instance.[52] In 1969, with World Bank support, the federal government founded the Agricultural Bank of Malaysia. Subsequently, existing grassroots organizations such as the Farmers' Co-operatives Societies and the Farmers' Associations were

[45] Government of Malaysia 1970, p. 8, table 6; Courtenay 1995, Appendix, p. 154, table 1.
[46] Arromdee 1969; Fryer 1971, pp. 256–65; Lim 1973, pp. 244–45.
[47] Courtenay 1995, p. 114.
[48] "New Image of Farmers Pledge by Tun," *The Star*, April 10, 1972.
[49] Mokhtar 1981, p. 6, table 3. [50] Goldman 1975.
[51] Bell, Hazell, and Slade 1982, p. 31; Jenkins and Lai 1991.
[52] Barnard 1979; Kahn 1981. By this time, cash rents had become commonplace (Ouchi, Saeki, Takahashi, et al. 1977, p. 83).

supplanted by larger Farmers' Organizations (FO). Predicated on a successful model pioneered in Taiwan, the FOs became the main channels through which fertilizer credits were distributed to producers.[53]

As the Muda project had neared completion and the country's Green Revolution was about to take off, national politics experienced an endogenous shock. The first spark, which set profound changes in motion, was the Alliance's surprising loss of electoral support in the 1969 parliamentary contest: Its vote tally fell 14 points from the 59 percent it had achieved in 1964. On its own, the dip was insufficient to initiate a national crisis. With 66 seats in Parliament, the Alliance still held five times the number of seats than its two rivals – the Islamic PAS and the Chinese-oriented Democratic Action Party (DAP) – held. Yet the Alliance underperformed in two strategic areas – in the agrarian states, the so-called Malay Heartlands, of Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis, and Kedah, where PAS made significant gains; and in the capital Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding state of Selangor, where many Chinese switched their support from the MCA to the DAP.[54]

Second, in response to the challenge the 1969 elections posed to UMNO and Malay supremacy, Malay nationalists, led by then Deputy Prime Minister Razak, and with the complicity of Malay-dominant security forces, helped to spark days of riots mostly contained to Kuala Lumpur against Chinese residents and property. Hundreds, if not thousands, were murdered in the clashes.[55] The bloodshed sullied Malaysia's image of being that rare postcolonial state where ethnic heterogeneity, economic growth, and political stability went together.[56]

After quelling the riots, the government introduced emergency rule and suspended Parliament. Razak and other young UMNO hardliners accused Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman of having been too pliant to Chinese interests, including that of private sector-led capitalism and foreign investment. They deemed that nothing short of restructuring society and the economy would stabilize the country, and UMNO's hold over it, in the long term. Restructuring first meant restraining the country's multiethnic democracy. The interim National Operations Council (NOC) was headed by Razak, who had essentially pushed the Tunku from power. The NOC passed a raft of legislative measures curtailing civil liberties and other democratic freedoms. Emblematic of this change was the dissolution of the Alliance, which was replaced by a new coalition, known as the National Front (Barisan Nasional, BN). In the new

[53] Chee 1974, p. 59; Fredericks 1977; Vokes 1978, p. 132.
[54] Kua 2007, chapter 2; Thomson 2019, pp. 187–98.
[55] Reid 1969; Rudner 1970.
[56] Lijphart 1990.

coalition, UMNO's clout was indisputable. Debating or criticizing the special privileges of Malays and the constitutional status of the Malay sultans became strictly prohibited.[57]

Second, restructuring centered around the New Economic Policy (NEP), announced in 1971 by the NOC. Ambitiously, the NEP aimed to alleviate poverty regardless of ethnicity but also to implement pro-Malay redistributive policies. Because this effort required significant state intervention in the economy, the NEP did face stiff opposition from segments of Malaysia's bureaucracy that favored continuation of the *laissez-faire* approach to growth and development. But Razak and his allies prevailed and established new agencies and sizable public enterprises on behalf of Malays, in which the agricultural sector figured prominently.[58] New government objectives and policies cast aside the typical aim of improving the rice sector's allocative efficiency.[59] As Chapter 1 had shown, rice provision in Malaya/Malaysia had always been political, but now its politics would be decisive in determining government survival and national stability.

Poverty Alleviation and Paddy Producers

The changes to the post-1969 political-economic landscape required shifting the goals of the Muda project mid-stream from a technocratic concern, with raising the country's paddy production capacity to the more challenging endeavor of improving the welfare of Malay cultivators. The World Bank saw double-cropping as part of the solution, as it lent another US$10 million toward the building of a (smaller) irrigation project in the east coast state of Kelantan. While construction had begun prior to 1969, government officials knew full well that timely completion might entice Kelantan's farmers, who had now voted heavily for PAS across three elections, back into UMNO's fold.[60]

Considerable public monies allotted for irrigation systems signaled the new government's commitment to enhancing farmer livelihood, as did the introduction of a pro-producer pricing policy.[61] The Green Revolution–led spike in output should have led to lower prices, with rises in domestic supply; however, the country's altered political landscape dictated otherwise. In the late 1960s, the government's GMP was

[57] Funston 1980, p. 231; Barraclough 1985; Crouch 1996, chapter 5; Kua 2007, pp. 1–9.
[58] Faaland, Parkinson, and Saniman 1990, pp. 27–29; Jesudason 1990, pp. 71–73; Jomo 1990, pp. 154–56; Kua 2007, pp. 23–28.
[59] Goldman 1975; Bell, Hazell, and Slade 1982, p. 25.
[60] Doering 1973, p. 209.
[61] Abdul Rahman and Ani 1971.

already hovering about 17 percent above world market prices;[62] from 1971 to 1976, it was allowed to rise gradually another 63 percent in domestic price terms, even though Malaysia's production costs were estimated to be about double the world price. Tellingly, the pricing policy was designed to disadvantage urban consumers, the majority of whom were non-Malay. Although at an elevated level, price stability was achieved, which contributed to political stability.[63] (One deleterious outcome was the increase in smuggling of cheaper rice from bordering Thailand.[64])

Whether the policy changes led to poverty alleviation, early results were ambiguous. One government study found that the on-farm income of Muda's farmers had risen almost fourfold from 1966 to 1975.[65] Some scholars cautioned against generalizing from Muda-related data due to the area's high level of public investment in infrastructure.[66] Nonetheless, by 1980, the national poverty rate among paddy farmers had declined from 88 percent a decade earlier to about 53 percent. Yet with the 1980 national poverty figure at about 30 percent, growers were falling further behind the rest of the population. By 1985, poverty among them rose to nearly 60 percent against a shrinking national rate of roughly 25 percent.[67] Paradoxically, the pro-producer pricing policy had been acting as a regressive tax for smallholders, let alone poor urban consumers, since both groups were net consumers of rice and the elevated GMP tended to raise prices, even for the cheap varieties, across the board.[68]

Disquiet over cultivator poverty contributed to the introduction in 1980 of a controversial paddy bonus scheme, a policy that remains in effect as of 2025. The plan was to price the bonus at M$33 per ton and implement a system where the producer could exchange a coupon for cash after six months. Kedah's cultivators, the most organized in the country, objected to the new plan that would buttress the bargaining power of large millers, since they were granted near exclusive rights over coupon distribution. Farmers staged a demonstration in the state capital of Alor Setar. Although blaming the unrest on PAS, radical Muslim students, and Communist troublemakers, officials acquiesced to farmers'

[62] Selvadurai 1972, p. 41.
[63] Brown 1973, p. 175; Jenkins and Lai 1991. Estimated at M$27.41 per picul; one picul of paddy equals 133.3 pounds or 60.3 kilograms.
[64] "New Thai Bid to Curb Smuggling," *The Star*, March 14, 1973; Hussein 1975.
[65] Jegatheesan 1977, p. 36, table 3.2. Downstream economic effects of the Muda project were considerable (Bell, Hazell, and Slade 1982, pp. 5–10).
[66] Doering, 1973, p. 147; Bell, Hazell, and Slade 1982, pp. 38–40.
[67] Courtenay 1995, p. 87, table 3.5. [68] Fatimah 1982.

demands. They converted the scheme into an immediate cash payout of M$165 per ton (on top of the official procurement price of M$463 per ton).[69] One seasoned expert recalls that rice policy of the UMNO-led BN governments in the 1980s focused on tackling the "3Ps" – poverty, paddy, and PAS.[70]

Gains from the bonus scheme still accrued disproportionately to the larger growers, slightly exacerbating the income disparity between the two.[71] Nor was the scheme able to address a few structural impediments to poverty alleviation. One was uneven land distribution; just as in the pre-1969 period, officials would not countenance land reform. In the mid-1970s, some 60 percent of farm holdings accounted for only about one-quarter of the size of the Muda project area.[72] Throughout Kedah, average farm sizes had declined marginally from 1.3 hectares in 1967 to 1.2 hectares about a decade later.[73] This was below what was, according to agricultural economists, required to lift a paddy farming household of five out of poverty – three to five hectares.[74]

Shrinking farm sizes were in part the result of land consolidation in the Muda area, as large-scale agriculturalists let tenants go to reap the rewards of the new technology and price distortions themselves. Yet it turned out that in Muda and elsewhere, the fragmentation of land ownership was a weightier problem in overcoming rural poverty.[75] To be sure, the oft-mentioned inheritance practices of Islam and customary practices (*adat*), where descendants were bequeathed equal amounts of land to multiple children over generations, played their part. These were longstanding cultural practices, however.[76]

Two new developments were contributing to intensified pressures on land ownership. The first was rapid population growth – nearly three percent per annum from 1960 to 1971. Second were subsidies and government price supports that were capitalized into land values, leading to paddyland inflation.[77] Government policies and the concomitant rise in land values facilitated the small-scale farmer's ability to eke out a

[69] Doering 1973, pp. 69–71; "Bitter Harvest in the Rice Bowl," *Far Eastern Economic Review* February 8, 1980, p. 20; Wong 1981, pp. 10–11. On actual Communist activities in northern Malaysia then, see Cheah (2002, p. 152).

[70] Interview, Fatimah Mohamed Arshad, then director of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Policy Analysis, University of Putra Malaysia, Serdang, February 12, 2015. See also Hart (1989).

[71] Tan 1987, p. 8. In 1986, it was raised to four percent.

[72] Gibbons, Lim, Elliston, *et al.* 1981, p. 22.

[73] Barnard 1979.

[74] Doering 1973, pp. 187–88.

[75] Fryer 1971, p. 262; Koninck 1981, pp. 29–30; Wong 1987, p. 128.

[76] Ho 1970; Horii 1972, p. 67.

[77] Syed Ahmad 1986, p. 92; World Bank 1988, p. iii; Lim 1989.

subsistence livelihood. But if he were able to double crop, no matter his precarious state, he was still better off than the tens of thousands of cultivators without access to modern irrigation; they continued to sow a single crop.[78]

During the early Green Revolution, Malaysia's landless did benefit from a rise in agricultural wages and from more employment opportunities made possible by double-cropping.[79] But mechanization forced a reversion. Promoted by MADA and other state agricultural agencies in the late 1970s, the use of large combine harvesters squeezed the income of the landless laborers. Scott reported a 44 percent decrease in their wage receipts as of 1980.[80] Landless laborers and smallholders were further marginalized by the politicized provision of state resources. Richer farmers dominated the FOs by forging tight alliances with UMNO elites; poor PAS supporters suffered as a result. By the end of the 1980s, the state, along with mechanization, had thoroughly penetrated the Muda area and elsewhere, worsening the divide between the haves and have-nots in rural society.[81]

Caused by push and pull factors, outmigration quickened pace. Agricultural laborers and petty producers abandoned paddylands in search of urban jobs in the booming manufacturing sector, brought about in part by increased productivity in rice cultivation.[82] In the early 1980s, official statistics revealed that nearly 900,000 hectares of agricultural land was left idle on Peninsular Malaysia, although only about one-fifth of it was paddyland; the majority was used for rubber cultivation.[83] Those who stayed behind benefited from the proceeds brought about by double-cropping, or they sought to increase their off-farm income in the expanding local service sector. That Malaysia reached near full employment during this period meant that incomes were on the rise, and the Green Revolution was making an impact beyond agriculture.[84]

FAMA to LPN

Besides increasing paddy production and buying the political support of farmers through income enhancement schemes, Malaysia's post-1969

[78] Selvadurai 1972, p. 4; Kahn 1981; Lim and Muhammad 1989; Fujimoto 1991; Jenkins and Lai 1991; Koninck 1992, p. 102.
[79] Afifuddin 1977, p. 2.
[80] Scott 1985, pp 75–76. See also Barnard (1979); Koninck (1992, p. 92).
[81] Rogers 1969; Scott 1985, pp. 82–83; Bray 1986, p. 158; Hart 1989; Nonini 1992, p.150; Koninck 1992, p. 149.
[82] From 1976 to 1980, manufacturing grew annually on average three and half times faster than agriculture (Jomo 1990, p. 226, table 9.1; Fatimah 2007, p. 22, figure 5).
[83] Mustapha and Alam 1985, p. 40, table 2; Fujimoto 1991. [84] Oshima 1987, p. 247.

Green Revolution policies also sought to ensure that local Chinese milling and marketing interests did not enjoy unreasonable profits from the production surges. These postharvest, interethnic dynamics shaped the evolution of the grain sector's governance in Malaysia.

As seen in Chapter 1, a motivating factor behind FAMA's founding was to protect Malay farmers against the supposedly exploitative Chinese middleman, with his deceitful weights and excessive deductions for moist output. Under the Paddy and Rice Marketing Board (PRMB), formed in 1967, FAMA was managing local regulatory and trading schemes as an effort to enforce the new regulations to guide the sector.[85] Yet FAMA was operating in an environment that preceded the 1969 riots and the production spurts of the early 1970s. In short, motivation to turn the agency into a body with rigorous executory powers was lukewarm.

After the dramatic political changes of the post-1969 period, the growing coercive power of the federal government was brought to bear on the rice sector. The powers granted to the new National Paddy and Rice Authority (Lembaga Padi dan Beras Negara, or LPN), PRMB's successor, were illustrative. Assuredly, the broad objectives of the LPN, established in 1971, were public-spirited – safeguarding fair and stable prices for paddy farmers and consumers, overseeing the emergency stockpile, and recommending new policies and coordinating their implementation. In its founding act, LPN's officers also were granted extraordinary powers of seizure, confiscation, and arrest. While the government justified issuing these powers to curb smuggling, their insertion into the law was also designed to control or threaten Chinese interests.[86] Some 16,000 rice traders, including 1000 wholesalers, were now required to renew their licenses with the LPN and not the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, which was seen as too close to Chinese business. Subsequently, the LPN took over the role of issuing milling licenses from state governments, in concert with the centralization of power in the post-1969 period.[87]

To stabilize the price of rice, the LPN had an array of mechanisms at its disposal – managing a buffer stock, determining import quotas, instituting variable tariffs, and enforcing compulsory sales by millers. The exogenous shock of the 1973–74 international rice crisis further strengthened the LPN's regulatory control over and consolidation of

[85] Selvadurai 1972, pp. 39–40; Vokes 1978, p. 184.
[86] Lembaga Padi dan Beras Negara Act 1971 (Act 47), especially articles 20 (1a, 1b) and 22 (1) (reprinted in Fredericks and Wells 1983, pp. 156–69); "All-Out War on Rice Smugglers," *The Star*, September 14, 1973.
[87] "Rice Milling: LPM to Take Over Issuing of Licenses," *The Star*, April 8, 1977.

the industry. When private traders balked at purchasing rice stocks at inflated prices on the world market,[88] even with the help of government subsidies and with exemptions from mandatory purchases from the government stockpile,[89] the government introduced price controls in mid-1974 and tasked the LPN to contract with exporting governments to secure rice. These measures effectively squeezed the profit margins of Chinese rice dealers and millers.[90] Two years later, the government issued the LPN monopoly rights over rice imports, which allowed the agency to stabilize paddy prices for producers above border prices. Previously, the influx of cheap imports by private traders had frequently undermined the GMP. Moreover, as rice became subject to the restrictive Price Control Act, prices at different stages of the postharvest marketing chain could only be changed with cabinet permission.[91]

The LPN expanded rapidly. Its staff grew from 86 personnel in 1971 to almost 3500 by 1986.[92] The agency constructed and operated integrated milling, drying, and storing facilities. Protests of Chinese dealers and millers were muted by the weakened position of the MCA in the new BN alignment.[93] However, due to the capital-intensive nature of these investments, compromise was imperative. Improved drying capacity was considered vital because the threat of rain made drying the (now strategic) wet season crop outside risky; large amounts of ruined paddy would have been a "political embarrassment for the government."[94] So, not all Chinese interests in artificial drying were targeted. Yet the LPN did expand procurement capacity at the expense of private traders: From only about 12 percent in 1973, by 1985 it was purchasing nearly half the harvests produced.[95] This change was prompted in part by political pressure for the LPN to purchase moist, low-quality rice from Malay cultivators.

Chinese traders fretted about this crowding out, as did the World Bank. In a scathing 1988 report, it contrasted the paddy sector's marginal economic value – exemplified by its now one percent contribution to Malaysia's GDP – with the massive subsidies the sector was receiving.

[88] "Now It's No Sale for the Rice Importers," *The Straits Times*, May 26, 1973.
[89] "Gov't Move Will Solve Rice Price Problem," *The Star*, March 28, 1973.
[90] "New Anti-hoarding Laws Panic the Rice Millers," *The Star*, January 20, 1974; Vokes 1978, pp. 238–40.
[91] Tan 1987, p. 13; Siamwalla and MacIntyre 2001, p. 256.
[92] LPN 1987, p. 27. Introduction of the paddy bonus scheme priced many small (permitless) mills out of the market, increasing the share of LPN-owned mills (Wong 1981, pp. 12–13).
[93] Vokes 1978, pp. 178–79.
[94] Fredericks and Wells 1983, p.82. See also Tan (1987, p. 11).
[95] LPN 1985, p. 24, figure V; Mokhtar Tamin and Meyanathan 1988, p. 110.

In 1986, for local rice, subsidies totaled about RM490 million, or RM585 per ton. The report also spotlighted LPN's inefficient mills, with recovery rates of 52–60 percent. They were lower than those in the many private mills that were being forced to close. Some remained open but operated at one-third capacity.[96]

Overall, the World Bank worried about the heavy costs borne by low-income consumers – urban and rural alike – and by the government's financial health on account of LPN's growth. In 1986 alone, LPN's domestic activities, especially its management of the national stockpile and its supervision of the paddy subsidy and bonus programs, operated at a M$96 million loss (approximately US$40 million). This figure did not even include the appreciable monies spent on input and other price support subsidies.[97]

Yet aided by bourgeoning economic growth (owing to the export of oil, of agro-industrial commodities, and of manufactured goods) and by unshakable BN dominance (landslide victories in four elections from 1974 to 1986 "gave consistent credence to BN confidence"[98]), the government readily shouldered the costs of the rice sector. These costs scarcely burdened the government's growing purse. From 1981 to 1985, a period that even encompassed an economic slowdown, the costs of imported rice, for example, averaged less than one percent of the country's export earnings.[99]

Financial cost-benefit analysis rarely figured in the government's paddy and rice policies in the aftermath of the 1969 riots and the completion of the Muda project. But by the mid-to-late 1980s, the grip that the rice sector had held on the minds of UMNO's leadership was beginning to loosen. This was especially so for the pro-economic growth faction of UMNO, led by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad; it was facing a serious internal party challenge by a pro-distribution faction.[100] In power since 1981, Mahathir fixated on heavy industrialization. It formed a core pillar of his grand vision for a technologically driven modern economy. Though raised in the state capital of Kedah and considered an ultra-Malay nationalist, Mahathir showed little interest in smallholder agriculture. For him such farmers exuded the exemplary, ingrained stereotypical traits of the so-called Malay mindset that he criticized early in his political career – impossibly conservative, fatalistic,

[96] World Bank 1988, pp. iv, 9. See also Tan (1987, pp. 2, 52).
[97] Ibid. See also Baldwin (1985) and Pletcher (1990).
[98] Slater 2010, p. 167.
[99] Tan 1987, p. 31, table 11; Jomo 1990, pp. 169–76.
[100] Funston 1988; Means 1991, chapter 7.

obsequious, passive. This belief remained with him throughout his life.[101]

With the 1984–91 National Agricultural Policy casting aside the goal of complete rice self-sufficiency, it symbolically signaled the end of the Green Revolution in Malaysia.[102] In its stead, Mahathir decided on a course of organizational innovation. While the World Bank had recommended liberalizing the country's foreign trade in rice – after all, Malaysia long had one of the most open economies in the region[103] – Mahathir opted to privatize the LPN. But he did so in way that clashed with World Bank tenets on privatization (Chapter 3). By the mid-1980s, the country's self-sufficiency rate had already declined to about 75 percent and would slide further still. Calculating by weight rather than cost, the real rate was lower. Moreover, an estimated one-third or more of the rice that supposedly was grown domestically was smuggled mostly from Thailand.[104] Questions over the reliability of the country's paddy and rice statistics that production nationalists were publicizing were also raised. Illustratively, following a seminar presentation by an LPN official, the very first question he fielded from the audience of likewise experts was the following:

> How reliable is our data? … Take for example the Muda scheme … the area was said to be 260,000 acres. [When] we carried out an [aerial photograph] exercise … The acreage was finally determined to be 237,000 acres. Well, that is a big difference … On the question of yield … In actual farmers' fields, yield loss is about 20%. So how reliable is our yield figure?

The LPN official answered: "We in the LPN also question this often … About the data problem we have arguing about it for the last 5 to 10 years … We have to use the data available and quote the source."[105] Even the respected Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Mardi) questioned the veracity of the country's agricultural statistics. In a 1981 report, it wrote frankly that the "exact acreage under padi cultivation is unknown since available statistics only indicate areas for padi rather than those actually planted with the crop." Nor does the

[101] In his 850-page memoir (2011), Mahathir avoids mention of the Green Revolution and observes once (p. 246) that young Malays were rejecting farm work. (There is a perfunctory photo of him with rice farmers.) On his views of Malay traits, see Mahathir (1970, chapter 9), Khoo (1995, pp. 84, 114–24, 261–71), and Wain (2012, chapter 4).

[102] Mokhtar Tamin and Meyanathan 1988; Jomo 1990, pp. 207–08. A World Bank report (1984) was influential in this regard.

[103] Bowie and Unger 1997.

[104] Tan 1987, p. 49, table 18; World Bank 1988, Annex 3, pp. 4–5.

[105] Ismail 1978, esp. pp. 11–12.

method of yield estimation based on crop cutting "take into account losses during harvesting, threshing and handling."[106]

Beneficially for the LPN, and thereafter its privatized successor (Chapter 3), decreases in paddy cultivation – authentic stats be damned – meant increased imports. Combined with even cheaper costs as world rice prices continued to slump, this confluence of events would lead to appreciably higher margins. In 1986, according to the World Bank, "consumers paid M$78 million over the import cost to LPN."[107] As opportunities to seize monopoly profits from these deliveries mounted, rents expectedly accrued to key allies of the regime. On the whole, they would bypass the country's paddy growers, even though, through outmigration and double-cropping, they were financially better off than they were prior to the country's implementation of the Green Revolution. So too was the country's food security.

Indonesia

Beginning in Central Java in October 1965, the six-months-long killings of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians orchestrated by Major General Soeharto's army is properly understood as an anticommunist massacre. But Soeharto's usurpation of power from Soekarno in March 1966 also stemmed from a rice crisis.

Rice had grown scarce.[108] By mid-1965, the effects of Soekarno's ban on imports, as noted in Chapter 1, took hold, and hyperinflation was depreciating the cash with which planters needed to purchase key inputs. Unsurprisingly, a New Order general blamed the deteriorating situation on PKI machinations. He speculated that the communist party was purchasing exceptional volumes of rice throughout 1965 in preparation for its coup, and the stockpile would be released upon its success to win the masses' hearts. The anticommunist bloodbath following the killing of six army generals on October 1 compounded matters by disrupting the promising Bimas programs and the planting season for the main harvest in 1966. Rice output on Java for that year was down considerably from the one prior.[109]

By January 1966, rice was selling for about four times the price a year earlier. In the same month, *The New York Times* reported that Soeharto's generals "have de facto control but are reluctant to take over the

[106] Mardi 1981, p. 1. [107] World Bank 1988, p. 9.
[108] Telegram from 212 American Consul in Surabaya to Jakarta, December 12, 1965.
[109] Biro Pusat Statistik 1966, p. 1, table 3; Rieffel 1969; Franke 1972, pp. 27–29; Palmer 1976, p. 29; Tirtosudiro 2002 [1969].

administration of Government, because they do not want to be blamed for any economic collapse and food crisis that may develop."[110] These were the same generals behind the public campaign to pin the precipitous rise in rice prices on Soekarno's government. As speculators hoarded the cereal, periodic street fighting, especially in Jakarta, broke out between the left and right wings of the student movement. Backed by Soeharto's fellow generals, right-wing protestors demanded that, among other things, Soekarno's government lower the prices of gasoline, public transport, and rice. The uncertain delivery of rice rations helped to erode the critical support that Soekarno's administration needed among the armed forces and civil service.[111]

Much ink has been spilled on the role Western anticommunist governments played in the gruesome events of 1965 and 1966. While much of it remains speculative, it is now known that at least there were efforts to strengthen the hand of Soeharto's right-wing faction in its power struggle against Soekarno and his leftist allies through the supply of strategic materials, among which rice and cash were foremost. Led by the US, food aid was delivered covertly between the alleged coup of October 1, 1965 and Soeharto's March 1966 putsch against Soekarno. Subsequently, the material support grew in volume and in its publicness.[112] Despite aspects of this chaotic and bloody upheaval that at the time remained – and still are – shrouded in mystery, one element was clear to stakeholders and observers: Rice would be vital to any plan for providing economic and social stability *and* obtaining political legitimacy.[113]

Foreign rice was delivered to and distributed by the army, an arrangement with which Western governments were pleased to comply.[114] Three months after Soeharto's March putsch, to handle this crucial task, the army formed a body called the National Logistics Command (Komando Logistik Nasional, or Kolognas). To advance what it described as waging economic, social, political, and psychological warfare against the Communists, the army did not apologize for putting itself in charge of rice provisioning.[115]

A year later, Kolognas became the State Logistics Board (Badan Urusuan Logistik, or Bulog). The change was in effect in nomenclature only; the generals personally close to Soeharto from the army's elite

[110] "Indonesia Seeking Rice in Many Lands to Meet Food Crisis," *The New York Times*, January 20, 1966.
[111] Pauker 1967; Hughes 1967, pp. 197–241; Fryer 1971, p. 305; McDonald 1981, pp. 55–57.
[112] "Johnson Is Acting to Aid Indonesia," *The New York Times*, September 20, 1966; Sullivan 1969, pp. 295–344; Palmer 1976, pp. 27–28; Roosa 2006, p. 197; Simpson 2008, pp. 186–87, 194–206, 209–18; Robinson 2018, pp. 196–207.
[113] Arndt 1968; Grenville 1979; Arifin 1997, p. 5. [114] Eng 2015.
[115] Tirtosudiro 2002 [1969].

Strategic Command and its Special Operations lorded over the rice trade. As head of Kolognas and then Bulog, Brigadier General Achmad Tirtosudiro reported directly to Soeharto. Soeharto had designated Bulog as the sole authorized rice importer. In addition to overseeing rice imports, the other key task for Bulog was to continue distributing rice among the army – personnel loyal to Soeharto – and the civil service.[116]

Kolognas, followed by Bulog, contracted with regime allies anxious to shore up the young government. Led by the US with its PL 480 food aid program, from 1966 to 1969, these governments delivered over US$200 million worth of rice. The help continued. From 1969 to 1973, rice aid and other concessional purchases comprised almost two-thirds of total rice imports.[117]

The deliveries proved politically expedient, as multiple rice crises beset the regime. Drought caused rice prices to almost double in September 1967 and double again by January 1968. Tirtosudiro admitted that establishing a new agency, Bulog, in the middle of a rice crisis complicated local procurement across Java.[118] As a result, fear of destabilizing urban food riots was palatable. That close to half of all rice imports were consigned to Jakarta was indicative of this worry.[119] A seasoned observer noted at the time, but "for substantial PL 480 shipments which arrived in the nick of time in December [1967] and January [1968], the situation would have been even more serious."[120]

The expeditious arrival of sizable imports created their own problem: Because of contracts signed in late 1967, rice arrived throughout 1968 amid that year's bumper harvest. Oversupply pushed down prices and farmers' income. Domestic experts called for the suspension of the distribution to special budget groups until prices could be stabilized. After all, for every ton of rice Bulog released into the domestic market, about five were diverted into the rationing program. Since Soeharto had only two years prior raised the specialized rice quota per capita by 25 percent, scrapping it was unlikely.[121] Soeharto had acknowledged the need to secure the loyalty of the state sector in keeping his government in power, so feeding it would help in achieving this aim.[122]

Instead of eliminating the program, Soeharto followed the advice of foreign consultants to task Bulog with organizing a stockpile program.

[116] Ibid. [117] Glassburner 1969, p. 39, table 1; Bulog 1978, p. 10, table 3.
[118] Tirtosudiro 2002 [1969].
[119] Mubyarto 1969, p. 117; Sullivan 1969, p. 493; Bulog, c.1979/80, p. 8, table VI.3; Mears 1981, p. 213, table 6.8; Arifin 1994, pp. 3, 44; Tirtosudiro 1997, p. 19.
[120] Arndt 1969, p. 9.
[121] Mubyarto 1969, pp. 21–23; Bulog 1971, pp. 105–09, 136, figure 10; Mears and Moeljono 1981, p. 30, table 2.3; Palmer 1976, p. 35; Bulog 1982, p. 12, table 5.
[122] Elson 2001, p. 152.

Rice reserves consisting of imports and domestic supplies could be interjected into the market to help stabilize the grain's price and thereby alleviate urban unease. It would also allow farmers to plan and invest predicated on the knowledge that farm-level prices would remain steady.[123] By leveraging material support from foreign sources to operate both programs, Soeharto, some might say, sought to have his rice and eat it too.

Regime elites and foreign officials alike knew that, in addition to strategic imports, a sustained program of intensified paddy production was needed to bolster the legitimacy of the new government and enhance chances for its survival; concern over farmers' livelihood was not (yet) of primary importance.[124] International technical assistance arrived in abundance. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Ford Foundation, the FAO, and an alliance of donor governments, known as the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia, funded a coordinated multinational effort. Foreign specialists, working with local teams, conducted farm surveys, pest control experiments, fertilizer and seed trials, field demonstrations, and training sessions for seed inspectors and extension field agents. They also provided valuable farm equipment.[125]

Foreign governments sensed an opportunity and involved home corporations in the intensification campaign. German, Japanese, and Swiss companies signed multimillion-dollar contracts with the New Order government to team with Bimas and sell input packages consisting of MVs, fertilizers, pesticides, and equipment.[126] The multinationals even participated in the aerial spraying of pesticides on swaths of rice plots. Results disappointed, however. Fertilizer either arrived late or was illegally diverted to other uses. Moreover, as in the Philippine Masagana 99 program, planters on Java, who resented being coerced to participate in these rigid and demanding programs, were slow to pay back the loans and the costs of the inputs. Although by late 1970 and early 1971 contracts with foreign firms were terminated, the implementation of these programs, for some, had signaled the lack of interest the new regime had in tackling the rice industry's problems along with rural poverty. Rather, its leadership was content to rely on imports to close gaps in domestic supply and to underpin urban food security.[127]

[123] Falcon 1969; Hawes 1970, pp. 49, 117.
[124] Palmer 1976, p. 14; Manning 1988, p. 73.
[125] Hawes 1970, pp.113–23; on the IGGI, see Posthumus (1972).
[126] For a list of the many iterations of Bimas programs, see Palmer (1976, pp. 21–22).
[127] Arndt 1969; Mubyarto 1969, pp. 123, 127; Rieffel 1969; Franke 1972, pp. 29–46; "Merubah Orientasi Petani," *Tempo*, March 24, 1973, p. 7; Utrecht 1973; Hutabarat 1974, pp. 64–65; Robison 1986, p. 253.

Multinational chemical corporations were joined by Bulog officials and key army personnel in profiting from the early but ineffectual input distribution programs. Kickbacks from foreign rice suppliers were commonplace, as was skimming from Bulog's voluminous distribution to special budget groups. Even the size of Bulog's annual budget – amounting to over a whopping 40 percent of the entire routine expenditure of the national budget – was unable to deter Bulog officials from engaging in speculative and corrupt activities.[128]

Scandals proliferated. Rather than purchase surplus rice from such productive provinces off of Java as South Sulawesi, officials deposited agency funds in private banks in Jakarta. Some of the money was lost when these high-interest-bearing accounts proved unsustainable, causing a few of the banks to crash.[129] In East Kalimantan and in Riau, a dozen or so officials embezzled millions of dollars in agency funds.[130] Bulog's head admitted: "If each person who did something wrong was fired, Bulog would be finished."[131] American advisers urged to enhance Bulog's organizational capacity by directly purchasing paddy from farmers. Instead, Bulog officials and army officers sold lucrative licenses to ethnic Chinese merchants, creating a dynamic system of distribution and preferential access for favored traders, wholesalers, and millers. In short, Bulog was a greased money-spinner for its leadership and key civilian and army allies.[132]

The New Order's first development plan of 1969–74, of which nearly two-thirds was funded by foreign aid, did allot money to enhance rice production.[133] The budget supported irrigation construction and agricultural-related industrialization. The country's first fertilizer factory had opened in 1964 in Palembang, but achieving the ambitiously set target of complete self-sufficiency in rice by 1973/74 would require greater productive capacity. Foreign aid was made available to finance a considerable portion of this agro-industrial expansion.[134]

It would take time for these facilities to come on-stream. While Bulog was preoccupied with rent-seeking, the persistent arrival of rice imports –

[128] Arndt 1968; Mackie 1970.
[129] "Ratu Pelita Sedang Gundah," *Tempo*, October 28, 1972, pp. 5–10; Hutabarat 1974, pp. 52–53.
[130] "Korupsi Dolog (Sambungan)," *Tempo*, December 11, 1976, pp. 77–78; Bulog 1977, Appendix 1, p. 2; "Kepala Sub Dolog Di Tanjung Pinang Itu," *Tempo*, August 27, 1977, pp. 38–39.
[131] "Bustanil Minta Empat Mata," *Tempo*, August 27, 1977, pp. 7–8.
[132] Falcon 1969; Grenville 1973; Crouch 1978, pp. 278–79, 296–97, 327; Robison 1986, pp. 231–33; Elson 2001, p. 192.
[133] Palmer 1976, p. 21, table 2.7; Mas'oed 1983, pp. 142, 147–48.
[134] Kolff 1971; Palmer 1976, p. 9, note 1; Dick 2003, p. 313.

well over one million tons per annum, of which rice aid comprised a significant portion[135] – bought the regime vital time. It freed New Order leadership from worries over urban food security to concentrate on other such threats as suppressing student demonstrations in Jakarta, rooting out Soekarnoist elements in the armed forces, and chasing the last remnants of Communist insurgents in East Java and West Kalimantan. The languishing of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians accused of being Communists in prison camps was also a matter that demanded attention.[136]

The regional rice crisis of 1972 and 1973 also grabbed the attention of the New Order leadership. As we saw in the cases of Malaysia and the Philippines, its severity spawned institutional changes in the sector. In response, Malaysia's federal government granted the LPN its import monopoly license, while Marcos introduced his Masagana 99 production program. In Indonesia, reforms induced change in the sector's institutional hierarchy. The government revamped existing farmer cooperatives into agglomerated versions known as BUUD, through which most government material resources would pass. The number of cooperatives, as a result, rose sharply.[137]

Atop the hierarchy, the crisis induced leadership change at Bulog. The agency shouldered much of the blame for the price spikes, having mismanaged its import, procurement, and stockpiling responsibilities. Widespread hunger was reported across the northern coast of Central Java, and the surge in rice prices had sparked a new round of urban student protests nationwide. Protests culminated in a prolonged stand-off between two factions of New Order generals, as well as the outbreak of riots that battered Jakarta's business district in January 1974.[138] In 1973 alone, Indonesia spent US $600 million on rice imports, a sum so massive that it "would have wiped out total foreign exchange earnings in 1966… ."[139] Soeharto responded by replacing Tirtosudiro with the latter's deputy, Brigadier General Bustanil Arifin. Regime technocrats applauded the move. They had been urging state leadership to contain Bulog's corruption and bolster its competency. In a near repeat of the events of 1968, prices subsided in 1973 with the arrival of PL 480 rice shipments from the US and additional imports from Japan, Malaysia, and elsewhere.[140]

[135] Birowo and Hansen 1981; Mears and Moeljono, 1981, pp. 59–62, table A2.1.
[136] Kammen and Zakaria 2012.
[137] BUUD (Badan Usaha Unit Desa) would later be known as Koperasi Unit Desa (KUD) (Mahoney 1981).
[138] Hutabarat 1974, p. 29; Ali, Ahmad, Hamid, *et al.* 1996, pp. 128–29.
[139] Palmer 1976, p. 85.
[140] Hutabarat 1974, pp. 29, 38–40; Timmer 1975; Crouch 1978, pp. 281, 327; May 1978, pp. 361–68; Ali, Ahmad, Hamid, *et al.* 1996, pp. 128–30; Arifin 1997, p. 10.

More impactful than Tirtosudiro's dismissal was the unexpected jolt the rice industry received from the 1973/74 oil boom. To Soeharto's credit, he directed portions of the oil windfall into investments in irrigation and in fertilizer subsidies. The latter were funneled through village cooperatives and enabled the government to keep more easily to its pledge of maintaining of one-to-one price ratio between a kilogram of milled rice and a kilogram of urea. Cheaper institutional credit channeled through the Indonesian Peoples Bank via the Central Bank, moreover, fostered the purchase of small milling facilities by cooperatives.[141] Their proliferation, it was hoped, would loosen the stranglehold the ethnic Chinese had on the postharvest marketing system (Chapter 1). The choking off of credit for the construction of large-sized commercial mills was also indicative of this intent.[142] Yet efforts to invigorate BUUD activities created unwanted competition for members of the non-Chinese Indonesian Millers Association (Perpadi). Its head complained that dozens of his association's mills were facing bankruptcy on account of these pro-BUUD policies.[143] He failed to mention that Perpadi's mills were also being squeezed by those owned by New Order generals.[144]

Meanwhile, to better address price fluctuations, the abundant oil tax revenue also financed the holding of additional rice reserves by Bulog. Bulog was busily building warehouses across the country, although private contractors grumbled that they could build them for a third the cost.[145]

From the coerciveness of New Order cultivation campaigns to weak local bureaucracies unable to manage the complexity of multiuser irrigation systems or unable to deliver fertilizers on time, shortcomings in the field persisted.[146] Other abiding constraints increased. The exploitation of small-scale planters by local officials and village leadership was long-standing, but corruption worsened as resources multiplied. As had happened at the paddy centers of the early 1960s (Chapter 1), village and BUUD leaders sold subsidized inputs on the black market. To Bulog

[141] Timmer 1973.
[142] "Bendera Putih Perpadi," *Tempo*, December 30, 1972, pp. 36–37; Mears 1981, pp. 112, 187; Jatileksono 1987, p. 18, figure 2.
[143] Known by the Indonesian acronym Perpadi (Persatuan Penggilingan Padi dan Pengusaha Beras Indonesia). "Dijual: 70 Pabrik Beras," *Tempo*, July 5, 1975, pp. 40–41.
[144] "Farolan Berkemas-kemas," *Tempo*, August 4, 1973, pp. 6–7; "Rice Milling Machine Comes to a Small Javanese Village and Changes Indonesians' Way of Life," *The New York Times*, November 30, 1975.
[145] Bulog 1978, p. 25, Annex VI; "Di Sela-Sela Gudang Beras," *Tempo*, December 18, 1976, pp. 6–7.
[146] Hansen 1972; Sajogya and Collier 1973.

they also sold non-BUUD paddy packed in BUUD bags. (Bulog paid a small premium for cooperative-grown paddy.) BUUD leaders also coerced farmers to sell their output below official floor prices in order to raise the cooperatives' profit margins.[147] Yet BUUDs also faced their own exploitative pressure from above: Local officials demanded they deliver prodigious amounts of rice so that the former could fulfill the unrealistic quotas set by their higher-level counterparts.[148]

Another old problem given new life was pest outbreaks. They grew in size and severity because of the vulnerability of the widespread and prolonged monocropping of IRRI-made seed varieties.[149] The brown planthopper pandemic of the mid-1970s destroyed thousands of hectares of rice crops across the country and caught the national rice policy team, led by President Soeharto, unawares.[150] The outbreak forced Bulog officials to scramble to expand domestic procurement and secure additional imports, including hundreds of thousands of tons more PL 480 rice.[151]

The pest outbreaks devastated the livelihoods of large and small growers alike, as well as the tens of millions of landless agricultural laborers now out of work. The dry weather of 1976 only added to the misery. Reports of hunger in even such traditional rice-surplus provinces as Bali and West Sumatra circulated widely.[152]

Revealingly, neither pest infestations nor climatic conditions were behind the record amount of rice imports (1.97 million tons) set in 1977. Instead, responsibility lay with the head of the rice policy team, Soeharto. Three years after the Green Revolution was supposed to result in self-sufficiency, imports reached nearly 14 percent of total rice supply, the highest mark since 1963. Bulog, meanwhile, interjected twice the volume of rice into the market in 1977 than it did the year prior.[153] According to a frank assessment by Bulog, the record-setting imports and massive market interjections were connected: They arose from an

[147] "Asal IGGI Tahu Saja," *Tempo*, March 3, 1979, pp. 60–61; "Antara Impor dan Swasembada," *Tempo*, November 21, 1981, pp. 70–74.

[148] Fryer 1971, p. 312; Arndt 1975; "BUUD Ogah-Ogahan?" *Tempo*, May 15, 1976, pp. 6–7; May 1978, p. 366; Birowo and Hansen 1981; Mahoney 1981.

[149] IR-5, IR-8, C3–64, IR-26, and later Pelita 1 and 2. Indonesia's MV breeding floundered until the early 1980s ("'Khmer Merah' Menyerbu Lagi?" *Tempo*, August 20, 1977, pp. 30–31; Jatileksono 1987, pp. 19–23; Fox 1991).

[150] "Bukan Target Tapi Harga," *Tempo*, February 16, 1974, pp. 6–7.

[151] "U.S. Will Send Indonesia Grain Worth $35.2 Million," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1976; Bulog 1978; Mears and Moeljono 1981, pp. 59–61, table A2.1; Timmer 1987; Eng 2015, p. 247, table 15.1.

[152] Soejono 1976; "Melawan Kemarau," *Tempo*, March 27, 1976, pp. 25–26; Dapice 1980; Manning 1988, p. 72.

[153] Bulog 1986b, p. 26; Jatileksono, 1987, p. 27, table 6.

anxious Soeharto to ensure "the largest possible extent stability of food prices in general and of rice prices in particular … in view of … the May 1977 general elections and the March 1978 Presidential elections at the General Session of the Constitutional Assembly."[154]

In addition to the massive US$678 million spent on imports – the large price tag was also the result of Indonesia bidding up the price against itself on the international market – the government provided Bulog with extra finances. It did so to increase Bulog's procurement to prevent downward pressure on farmgate prices owing to the oversupply of imports.[155] To be sure, the state's ample oil-derived revenue, which by then had surpassed foreign aid as the regime's top revenue source, proved exceptionally expedient. From 1969 to 1977, the budget surplus rose by more than 40 times in size to Rp. 1.28 trillion.[156]

Besides urban consumers and larger farmers with surplus paddy to market, the oversupply of rice benefited importers. In contrast to the squeezing of small-scale ethnic Chinese intermediaries from the postharvest marketing system, Soeharto was enabling select Chinese businessmen to accumulate dizzying amounts of capital. Unlike non-Chinese businessmen, their economic clout could not morph into political threats to his regime.[157] Chief among them was Liem Sioe Liong. His personal relationship with Soeharto dated to the late 1940s, or early 1950s, when Soeharto was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Diponegoro Division of Central Java. By the mid-1970s, Liem's massive Bogasari firm, through Bulog, had a near monopoly on the importing and milling of wheat. But it, too, was a major rice importer. Fortunately for importers, from 1978 to 1980, the country's rice import bill had grown to an annual average of over US$620 million.[158]

Although Bogasari obtained special import licenses for wheat and rice from Bulog, Bulog also organized its own purchases abroad. A Philippine industry publication printed a joke among traders that went: "the economy of Thailand … would accelerate every time Indonesia's powerful chief rice buyer, Bustanil Arifin, touched down at Bangkok's airport."[159]

[154] Bulog 1978, p. 1. Latham (2024, p. 54) notes the size of these imports without recognizing the importance of the elections. One issue that had made Soeharto anxious at the time was the growing visibility and influence of political Islam.

[155] "Kalau Tak Ada Perbaikan Produksi…", *Tempo* June 10, 1978, p. 48.

[156] Booth and McCawley 1981, p. 128, table 5.1; Kuntjoro-Jakti, 1981, pp. 52, 65–66, tables 2.11, 2.12.

[157] Anderson 1983.

[158] Robison 1986, p. 303; Jatileksono 1987, p. 27, table 6; Elson 2001, p. 64; Borsuk and Chng 2014, pp. xiii, 166–69, 173; Eng 2015.

[159] "Indonesia Success Story: Bountiful Rice Crops Turn It from Buyer to Seller," *Animal Husbandry and Agricultural Journal*, November 1984, esp. p. 17. (This article may have first appeared in the *Asian Wall Street Journal*).

By acquiring about one-fifth of the internationally traded supply of rice, Indonesia had become the world's largest rice importer. To keep Bulog from bidding against itself on the international market, its buyers sought to keep negotiations with foreign suppliers secret. Another tactic involved deploying the services of anonymous agents, who often had ties to Liem's Salim Group and charged 10–20 percent commissions. In times of scarcity or urgency, the Salim Group sourced rice from the People's Republic of China via Hong Kong-based brokers, which added to its expense.[160]

In the mid-1970s, another powerful army-controlled, state-owned enterprise, the national oil company Pertamina, was financially imploding under the weight of profligate spending, corruption, and unsupervised overseas borrowing. Whereas Pertamina's losses amounted to billions, Bulog's "inefficiencies" paled in comparison with losses amounting to tens of millions. So, coupled with improved performance under Arifin, the agency's remit was expanded over time to encompass sugar, soybeans, wheat, corn, meat, and other commodities.[161]

With the 1977 and 1978 elections past and a still-sketchy record on food production per capita – in large part due to a population growth rate of over two percent and stagnation in the production of secondary crops[162] – Soeharto finally seized on the twin goal of achieving rice self-sufficiency and augmenting farmer welfare. Doing so had taken more than ten years in power, despite the availability of abundant foreign reserves and foreign assistance. What explains the change in focus, which necessitated in part a shift from an evident urban bias in policymaking to one that more favored rural interests?

For some analysts and participants, there was no change, since they insist that Soeharto was committed to solving the country's agrarian problems from the outset. The following is exemplary: "By any measure, the policy pursued by Indonesia in the period from 1969 to 1986 has been successful."[163] We know this not to be true. More nuanced accounts suggest that Soeharto was guided by a deeply rooted belief, drawn from the wellsprings of Indonesian (or Javanese) society and history, in the obligation of an enlightened moral leadership to care for the vulnerable, and especially the rural poor.[164] Still, such ideologically driven interpretations assert a continuity in policy and practice, and are

[160] "Perang Melawan Kaphra," *Tempo*, March 10, 1973, p. 36; "Kalau Tak Ada Perbaikan Produksi," *Tempo*, June 10, 1978, p. 48; Timmer 1987.
[161] Arndt 1975; Palmer 1976, p. 177; Bulog 1986b, p. 40; Bresnan 1993, chapter 5.
[162] Birowo and Hansen 1981; Hayami and Kikuchi 1981, pp. 43, 47, tables 3.3, 3.7; Teken and Suwardi 1982, pp. 87–88, 90, table 4.2; Booth 1988, pp. 34, 41, tables 2.3, 2.8.
[163] Hedley and Tabor 1989, p. 51. [164] Liddle 1987; Jenkins 2021, pp. 108–11.

difficult to sustain in light of the murder of hundreds of thousands of poor rural Indonesians simply because they were Communists or sympathetic to Communism's broader vision of collective salvation. A related argument maintains that Soeharto's support for the Green Revolution sprang from recollections of the rural components of the anticolonial revolution and his understanding of poverty and food insecurity as root causes of the radicalism that pervaded rural Java in the 1950s and 1960s.[165] Yet when we place Soeharto's support for the Green Revolution in comparative perspective, we learn that his endorsement was not unusual. Political elites – or in this book's terminology, emerging production nationalists – in the Philippines and Malaysia also threw their enthusiastic support behind the new technology. If anything, for his first decade in power, Soeharto prioritized urban, not national, food security, which even Bulog's inaugural head, Tirtosudiro, acknowledges.[166] Finally, as we saw in Chapter 1, from their origins in the immediate post-WWII era onward, Indonesia's rice policies have long been infused by moral considerations.[167] While this interpretation is certainly valid, along with these other ideas-led explanations, it cannot explain the change in Soeharto's approach starting in the mid-to-late 1970s.

Instead, we must look to considerations of executive preference and political power. Only after Soeharto overcame the political challenges confronting him, through which he consolidated his authority, could he prioritize rural development. Only after he judged his power secure do these ideas-driven understandings gain some traction.

The mid-to-late 1970s began a period of unprecedented tightening of Soeharto's control over state and society. Not only were the 1977/78 elections secured – aided by voluminous rice imports – but by then so too were the Communist threat and student agitations. Soeharto clamped down on students by issuing restrictive regulations on campus activities. But the crackdown preceding and succeeding the elections also targeted critical journalists and budding Islamist groups.[168] With the implementation of the 1979 law on standardizing village governance, millions of villagers were, even if unwittingly, submitting to centralized power and top-down organization. Village headmen became empowered state agents with authority to minimize dissent and report so-called troublemakers to higher officials. In addition to potential "threats" from below, Soeharto contained a threat to his leadership from above: An influential

[165] Elson 2001, pp. 150, 172, 176–177; Fakih 2020, pp. 44–45.
[166] Tirtosudiro 1997, esp. p. 19; see also Suwidjana (1981, p. 157); Timmer (1987, p. 13).
[167] Vu 2003. [168] Aspinall 2005, pp. 20–27; Elson 2001, pp. 220–24.

group of disgruntled former generals and other luminaries, who complained that the president had become too powerful and autocratic.[169]

Seizing greater control to accelerate a national paddy production effort and farmer livelihood campaign mattered, but so too did its economics. Here, the second oil boom of 1978/79 proved indispensable. The bonanza financed a new Special Intensification campaign and other programs to enhance cultivator welfare. Learning from past mistakes, Soeharto's regime gave greater autonomy to the growers to make cultivation-related decisions.[170] The third development plan (1979–84) stressed commitment to producer livelihood, put into practice by a 1980 presidential decree on the defense of a floor price. Giving legal standing to assurances that farm-level prices would remain above production costs was crucial to boosting on-farm income; it gave the planter confidence to invest in the inputs to raise output. Along with other policy decisions that continued to favor the farmers, the way was paved to achieve rice self-sufficiency by 1984.[171]

The chief input was inorganic fertilizers. By the late 1970s, their output from state-run factories was nearly meeting domestic demand.[172] And as annual oil-driven development budgets soared – from Rp. 8780 billion in 1976 to Rp.13, 958 billion in 1980 – a sizable portion of this increase was earmarked for fertilizer subsidies.[173] These subsidies jumped from Rp. 32 billion in 1977/78 to over Rp. 730 billion five to six years later.[174] According to one informed observer, the immense subsidization "effectively shifted part of the burden of risk associated with technological learning from farmers to the government."[175] The magnitude of that shift is reflected in the tripling of average fertilizer usage per hectare on Java (where half of Indonesia's population lived) – from 101 kilograms in 1970 to 346 by 1984. Off Java, the rate of change increased more than tenfold – from 15 to 160 kilograms.[176]

With the wide availability of subsidized fertilizers, the government could have kept the floor prices of paddy stable to balance urban and rural interests. As did the Malaysian government, it opted otherwise. Not only did Soeharto's administration lift ceiling prices, but it also continually raised the floor price, so much so that by 1981 it surpassed prevailing

[169] Jenkins 1984; Warren 1993. [170] Daroesman 1981.
[171] Liddle 1987; Timmer 1987.
[172] Mears and Moeljono 1981, p. 41; McCawley 1981, p. 65, table 3.2.
[173] Sundrum 1986, p. 49, table 5; see also Booth and McCawley (1981, p. 132, table 5.3).
[174] Tabor 1992, p. 182, table 6.11. In 1985 this figure, including pesticide subsidies, was roughly US$657 million.
[175] Pincus 1996, p. 6. [176] Booth 1988, p. 150, table 5.9.

world rice prices.[177] As a result, the key price ratio of paddy to urea was skewed progressively in favor of the cultivator. In 1979/80, it was recorded at an already advantageous 1.35; three years later, it swelled another 42 percent.[178]

With an increased pace in the rehabilitation and especially expansion of irrigation systems, a string of mostly good weather, and minimum pest disturbances owing to the introduction of brown planthopper-resistant MVs, Indonesia finally experienced the yield breakthrough for which it had been waiting at least since the colonial Ethical Policy of the early 1900s.[179] From 1969 to 1984, average yields on Java, where over 62 percent of the country's paddy was harvested, climbed from 2.6 tons per hectare to 4.6 tons. Nationally, yields rose from 2.3 to 3.9.[180] In 1984, the year in which Indonesia officially reached self-sufficiency, national paddy production was recorded at 38 million tons, a rise of about 110 percent from 1969. Of the sources of the production spurt, nearly 80 percent of the increased output on Java and about 60 percent on the less densely populated Outer Islands was derived from yield growth. On the latter, the expansion of wet-rice cropland, particularly on Sumatra, accounted for the remainder.[181] When measured in per capita terms, the rise in national production drops to about 50 percent. Still, the performance was impressive enough for the FAO in 1985 to award Soeharto with a prize in Rome for achieving self-sufficiency in rice.

By this time, understandably, views on Bulog had also shifted. There was no shortage of favorable assessments by those affiliated with the agency or with establishment technocrats. Even Robison, a prominent regime critic, was compelled to write that despite "continuing manipulation and embezzlement, these have not been allowed to fundamentally undermine Bulog's primary function of providing stability of pricing, marketing and supply of basic commodities."[182] Bulog had become adept at pursuing a dual-track strategy that would characterize operations at least until the Asian Financial Crisis and the New Order's demise in 1998: technocratic competence – for example, maintaining price stability – combined with rampant corruption and rent-seeking.[183] Distinctions blurred, however, on the question of rice imports, from which officials generated sizable rents, even as they made the case that shipments were fundamental to price stabilization efforts. How well

[177] Warr 1984; Timmer 1987a, pp. 9, 12 figure 1. [178] Bulog 1986a, p. 12, table 5.
[179] "Ngatiran, Katimun Dan Seonggok Gabah," *Tempo*, November 21, 1981, p. 72.
[180] Sugiyanto 1987, p. 29, table 1.6; Jatileksono 1987, p. 61, table 24; Pearson, Falcon, and Heytens, 1991, p. 18, table 2.5; Ali, Ahmad, Hamid, et al. 1996, p. 154.
[181] Bulog 1986a, p. 4, graph 2; Booth 1988, p. 41, table 2.8. [182] Robison 1986, p. 230.
[183] Danzer 2008, p. 34.

Bulog was able to pursue its conflicting strategy as Indonesia entered its post-Green Revolution phase will be addressed in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

The early to mid-1960s was a time of social and political ferment in Southeast Asia generally and in these three rice-deficient countries more specifically. Rural poverty and food insecurity lay at the bottom of both mass violence and potential political conflict. In Indonesia, the surprising post-WWII re-revitalization of the PKI was concentrated among the rural and food-poor of Central and East Java, precisely where the massive anticommunist killings perpetrated by Soeharto's henchmen and militias were also concentrated in 1965–66. In the Philippines, while the Huks had been defeated on the battlefield in the country's rice bowl, Central Luzon, remnants of the movement stubbornly remained politically active underground, including helping to form a new Philippine Communist Party. In Malaysia, worsening inequality spanned sensitive spatial (rural–urban) *and* ethnic dimensions (Malay–Chinese). Frustration was mounting among rank-and-file elements within the conservative UMNO party about the government's inability to address Malay paddy farmer poverty; electoral results were indicating that the rural sector was searching for new political patrons to heed their concerns. Amid the heightened tensions of the Cold War, pervasive food insecurity was an incendiary factor.

It was into this context that the West, with its seed-breeding experimentation and political will to expend large amounts of aid to actualize that science, rendered an unforeseen exogenous shock.[184] The development-cum-dissemination of the "miracle seeds" constituted one part of the equation for getting the Green Revolution moving. In addition to the technical and financial aid behind the new package of technology, which included inorganic chemicals and improved water control, the capacity of everyday farmers, both small and large, to apply the new inputs in their plots constituted the second part that gave life to this contingent moment of change.

In this way, preconditions (Chapter 1) and the Green Revolution's florescence within these broader political contexts shared considerable affinities. In recent sophisticated theorizing on state-building in

[184] Japan and China especially had prior long histories of breakthroughs with breeding improved varieties, and some of this knowledge was used by breeders at IRRI (Herdt and Capule 1983, pp. 3–4).

Southeast Asia, the emphasis on accounting for variation among these three countries specifically has led to the analytical exclusion of the critical role of exogenous factors, since the latter's congruence is considered unable to explain variation. But this chapter contends that emphasizing surprising and sufficient similarities has utility. Politically driven Western aid in unprecedented volumes was central to spurring significant technological change in the food-crop sector that indelibly shaped these countries' politics at the time. Given that authoritarianism deepened in each case amid the extensive spread of the Green Revolution technology, counterfactually speaking, it is difficult to imagine the stability and power consolidation these regimes achieved in the 1970s without amply bolstering their food security. The greater availability of rice, through imports supplied by and paid for foreign powers, particularly the United States, and through rapid yield gains that, in turn, eventually improved the income of millions of rural citizens, was key to these circumstances.

All told, each of these regimes – Soeharto's nascent New Order, Marcos's Martial Law regime that was only made possible by the president winning reelection in 1969 in part owing to the development performance of the early Green Revolution, and UMNO's growing stranglehold over the country's coalitional politics and its once flourishing democracy – would have experienced far more instability and possessed weaker claims to legitimacy under the persistence of the food-insecure conditions of the pre-Green Revolution period. A remarkable turn of events was needed to make this happen, in contrast to the decades-long frustrations of failing to overcome technological, political, and financial hurdles that the extensive application of new technology to produce a higher yield of a staple crop demanded (Chapter 1). Domestic governments bought into the program and built fairly competent administrations stretching from national capitals to the countryside to implement the technology, to instruct the growers on its proper application, to lend them the needed capital to purchase the pricey inputs through official channels, and to construct the required irrigation channels running through their plots.

To be sure, mistakes and misguided decision-making were pervasive; amid the unprecedented flow of resources allocated for and circulating through rural society, corruption rocketed. This chapter's accounting of the Green Revolution in each national case captures the ebb and flow of power politics, the successes *and* faults of the programs, in particular to provide a grounded check against some of the recent lionizing of the Green Revolution as a seamless program of technological change with little friction, or politics, that steadily guided these countries onto a road

of state-led agrarian transformation and development achievement.[185] Moreover, it was this period in which emerged proud production nationalists. They would draw on Green Revolution success as a justifiable means to influence institution building and rice policymaking. The norm of intervention was not born during this period, but *success* in protectionism undoubtedly was, leaving its imprint on rice politics in the region for decades subsequently, even as this particular rice policy model swiftly came under considerable pressure for reform. The Green Revolution rendered the production nationalists with sufficient legitimacy and material proof to parry efforts to liberalize rice markets. It also sowed the seeds, so to speak, of longstanding rice import regimes in each of these national cases, which Chapters 3 through 5 will examine in turn.

[185] Rock 2017; Taffesse and Tsakok 2019.

Part II

Post-Green Revolution Rice Import Regimes

3 Malaysia
Continuity Amid Innovation

> … this time there will be no miracles.
>
> *Far Eastern Economic Review* (1988)

In important aspects, Malaysia stands out among this book's three cases. The country has the most open economy, its GDP per capita is the highest by some margin, and by a similar measure, its rice self-sufficiency rate is the lowest. By the same token, its longtime domineering prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad, professed nonproduction nationalist tendencies. Yet countervailing forces justify Malaysia's inclusion as a case in developing this book's arguments: It exhibited key preconditions that fostered participation in the Green Revolution – in particular food insecurity and dire poverty among a distinctly Malay paddy farmer population (Chapter 1) – and it implemented that project with some success (Chapter 2). This chapter is devoted to tracing how that success since has conditioned the institutionalization of Malaysia's protectionist policy model in rice.

That model, which features a nonfunctionalist rice import regime, has served broader power interests. At the top, it has stimulated capital accumulation to bolster elite Malay and UMNO interests, and at society's lower socioeconomic rungs, protectionism and large agricultural budgets have ensured state resource distribution among Malay cultivators to keep them voting for UMNO. Yet the country's import regime is unusual; some might call it innovative: Ignoring World Bank advice to liberalize rice imports, Mahathir instead privatized the LPN to the consternation of production nationalists in the agricultural bureaucracy. Even with shares of the new firm, Bernas, publicly traded, starting in 1997, this chapter details how UMNO interests prevailed at the new privatized rice agency, through management control and retention of the critical monopoly import license. Nonetheless, Bernas's pursuit of profits through its import operations, and its assertive expansion in the domestic sphere were balanced against government-imposed social obligations that Bernas was obligated to fulfil – essentially, administering a range of welfare and subsidy programs for Malay farmers and millers that it inherited from the LPN.

Whenever and however a long-time ruler retires from power, as Mahathir did in 2003, a country will undergo significant change. Malaysia was no different. Its prideful production nationalists made headway under Mahathir's weaker successors by devising plans to trigger a Green Revolution-like productivity boost. Bernas countered by simply ratcheting up rice imports. After about a decade into the post-Mahathir state, Bernas underwent a second yet largely unforeseen change – the government facilitated the country's wealthiest *bumiputera* (native son) businessman to take the company private by delisting it from the stock exchange. The political opposition protested to no avail over allowing a single tycoon to control some 70 percent of the country's rice supply (through domestic procurement and milling and imports).

As this chapter stresses, Malaysia's keenly competitive post-Mahathir elections presented the opposition coalition with a chance to challenge the longstanding fusion of UMNO-led state-party-business interests, epitomized by the rice import regime: The opposition upset UMNO's ruling National Front (BN) coalition in the 2018 general elections. Supported by more accommodationist ethnic and urban interests, that coalition in its campaign platform promised to revoke Bernas's monopoly license (without necessarily pledging liberalization). Before the opposition upstart could announce a new rice import policy, the reform-oriented government was toppled by Malay nationalist party interests. The turnabout preserved Bernas's import monopoly. It was an instructive case of "near-miss" reform, where, in Capoccia's words, "in which the political struggle over the choice of different institutional options during a phase of uncertainty and institutional fluidity results in *reequilibration* rather than change."[1]

The country's competitive elections provided the opposition with a second chance to reform the protectionist policy model, solidifying Malaysian elections as robust change agents compared to those in Indonesia and the Philippines. Even so, Anwar Ibrahim, once Mahathir's heir apparent and the current prime minister, has balked at reforming the country's rice import regime. Some of the daunting pressures he faces mount from within Malaysia. These include transactional coalitional politics to keep himself in power and a legacy of Green Revolution success whose fundamental principle – state protection of small-scale Malay agriculturalists, or at least to preserve this appearance – remains unbowed. Other forces resonate from without – renewed concerns about the viability of international supply chains strained by a

[1] Capoccia 2015, p. 166 (emphasis in the original).

global pandemic, Russia's war in Ukraine, a major wheat exporter, and sharply rising food prices. All told, this chapter's exploration of the intermeshing of historical legacy, demographics, and ethno-party politics casts doubt as to whether the country will liberalize its rice import trade, even when Bernas's current import monopoly license expires in 2031.

Post-Green Revolution

As we saw in Chapter 2, a 1988 World Bank report blasted Malaysia's rice policies. It decried the sector's "increasing market disorder" and "extreme market rigidity," which, despite the government's "benevolent intervention," resulted in a contraction in production and stagnation in yield growth.[2]

Yields in Malaysia differ between Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia, and within the former, between granary and nongranary areas. Yet a national pattern of low-yield growth had taken hold, hovering slightly above one percent per annum from 1985 to 2010. This contrasted with the 3.5 percent annual raises on average for the main season crop on Peninsular Malaysia from 1972 to 1985.[3]

The lack of a second Green Revolution productivity surge, environmental concerns over fertilizer usage, and an ageing farm labor force were reasons for the slowdown that Malaysia shared with Indonesia and the Philippines. But the government was pivoting from food-crop agriculture to export agro-industries, led by palm oil, and to large-scale second-stage ISI – symbolized by the 1981 establishment of the government-linked Heavy Industries Corporation of Malaysia (HICOM). As such, the country was already entering a post-Green Revolution phase by the time the World Bank published its 1988 assessment. By 1986, manufacturing (22.6%) was contributing more to the economy than agriculture (21.7%). By 1991, agricultural labor had shrunk about two-thirds from its 1970 level, and the country surpassed another milestone in 1992 – the total number of persons employed in manufacturing eclipsed those in agriculture. The country's poverty rate impressively fell from nearly 50 to about 15 percent over a similar period of time, including from nearly 65 to about 20 percent among Malays.[4] Put differently, the country's economy was undergoing successful structural transformation.

[2] World Bank 1988, pp. ii, iii, 37.
[3] Government of Malaysia 1976, table 16.1, p. 286; Government of Malaysia 2012, table 8.1, p. 101.
[4] Yeoh, Noraini, Chuah, et al., 1997, p. 2; Rosegrant and Hazell 2000, p. 63, figure III.2; Khoo and Khoo 2012, p. 6, table 1.1; Ragayah 2014, p. 41, table 7; Sarena 2019, p. 95.

Accordingly, the World Bank recommended cuts in public spending on agriculture to reflect this reconfiguration.[5] In part, Mahathir obliged. Agricultural expenditures as a share of total government expenditures declined from 7.9 percent in 1985 to 5.7 percent in 1990. Absolute spending on agriculture, however, held steady over the same period.[6] This indicated that after the mid-1980s recession – caused by a dip in export commodity prices – Malaysia's economy, and thus total government expenditures, was growing at a brisk pace.

Electoral and development reasons drove spending on food-crop agriculture to bolster rural Malay incomes. As noted in the Introduction, the Malaysian case fits the parameters of the agricultural political economy (APE) school of thought well.[7] Through state-level governments and expansive patronage networks, the federal government lavished resources on heartland Malays to prevent UMNO's rival, PAS, from winning over Malay voters. Although agricultural experts lamented that the government was providing wasteful subsidies rather than spending on investments aimed at lifting productivity, UMNO preferred boosting votes to boosting productivity. UMNO-led BN administrations continued to manipulate electoral boundaries and assign rural constituencies disproportional electoral weightage so that rural votes counted more than urban ones, even as the country underwent rapid urbanization. This two-pronged strategy of directed state spending and electoral engineering proved effective: The UMNO-led BN coalition dominated the three federal elections held in the 1990s, except most notably in the rural northeastern state of Kelantan, where PAS captured the state government each time.

Regarding the World Bank report's other recommendation to liberalize factor prices and output prices, Mahathir temporized. His government continued its pro-producer orientation. In 1990, it raised the paddy price subsidy ("the paddy bonus") by almost 50 percent to RM248 per ton, even though world rice prices were slumping.[8] Instead of liberalizing the rice sector, Mahahtir opted to privatize a significant portion of it, although in a way that clashed with World Bank prescriptions (see below). In 1994, his government incorporated the LPN and changed its name to Padiberas Nasional Berhad (The National Paddy and Rice

[5] World Bank 1988, pp. vi–vii.
[6] Rosegrant and Hazell 2000, p. 141, table V.9, p. 144, table V.11.
[7] This has been underscored even among noncountry experts writing on the politics of economic growth and development in Southeast Asia (Siamwalla and MacIntyre 2001, pp. 254–61; Henley 2015, pp. 115–24; Rock 2017, pp. 108–11).
[8] Fatimah, Mohd. Ghazali, and Ahmad 1991. In 1993, the symbol for the Malaysian currency (*ringgit*) changed from M$ to RM.

Board), known as Bernas. Two years later, it was privatized, and in mid-1997, its shares were floated on the booming Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE).[9]

It was not a coincidence that in between the LPN's incorporation and Bernas's initial public offering (IPO) Malaysia had joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), which prioritized liberalization and privatization. Crucially, unlike the LPN, which had been receiving about M$200 million in government assistance each year, Bernas's financing would be independent from the state budget. It was thus exempted from restrictions and other conditions that the WTO sought to apply to state-trading enterprises, even if Bernas was no longer technically a "state" enterprise.[10]

Although the first grain parastatal in the region to be privatized, Bernas's novel status failed to stoke widespread controversy. Paddy farmers expected Bernas to continue with or even improve upon the services that had been provided by the LPN. Even if growers expressed concern, at the time hardly any autonomous organizations (save for an opposition party such as PAS) existed that could have articulated farmer interests publicly.[11] Nor was LPN's privatization novel within Malaysia. By the mid-1990s, Mahathir's privatization push had been underway for a decade or so, during which hundreds of SOEs in manufacturing, telecommunications, oil and gas, and infrastructure were sold or partially sold.[12] Privatization helped to lift the economy out of its mid-1980s slump (along with the acceleration of export-oriented manufacturing following the 1985 appreciation of the yen and relocation of Japanese firms to Malaysia). From 1989 to 1995, GPD per capita expanded at a vigorous rate of 6.2 percent per annum.[13]

Yet the agricultural bureaucracy did express concern over LPN's privatization. These field officers, policymakers, and bureaucrats had participated in the Green Revolution–led success of the 1970s and 1980s and were rightfully proud of their achievements. They lamented the shift in government focus, led by a prime minister who was at the peak of his powers,[14] away from paddy production that Bernas's

[9] The Malaysian government utilized multiple privatizing strategies. On the corporatization-followed-by-selling-shares method, see Gomez and Jomo (1997, pp. 81–82). Privatization (see below) spurred the KLSE's bull market.

[10] World Bank 1988, p. iv. The government via Bernas continued to subsidize paddy growing, which was allowed by the WTO as rice was placed on the highly sensitive list (Daño and Samonte 2005, pp. 193–94).

[11] Saliha and Weiss 2003.

[12] Tan 2008, chapter 3.

[13] Rosegrant and Hazell 2000, pp. 3–4, table 1.2; Drabble 2000, pp. 202–03. Jomo questions privatization's contribution (1995a, esp. p. 6).

[14] Slater 2003.

formation had signaled.[15] Around this time, in reference to the successful work on rice production by the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Mardi), the words "proud" and "pride" began to appear with regularity in the introductory messages by agriculture ministers to the institute's annual reports. Mardi's 20-year retrospective, published in 1990, boasts about the instrumental role the institute had played in the country's Green Revolution.[16]

Privatized Bernas

Privatization was altering the country's political economy. It was redistributing resources to middle- to upper-middle-class Malays through the generous provision of discounted shares, and to politically connected tycoons who took over corporate boards and seized valuable operating licenses. The manner of Bernas's privatization was common in Malaysia but deviated from the World Bank's preferred approach. The latter promotes the sales of SOEs via a competitive process where high-bid investors gain management control through auctions that are predicated on the noncollusive participation of multiple bidders. If auctions fail to attract a stipulated minimum number of bidders, guidelines typically dictate that the auction is nullified. Bernas's auction outcome was certified with a submission of a single bid. It came from an obscure domestic consortium, Budaya Generasi Sdn Berhad (BGSB). BGSB turned out to be controlled by UMNO stalwarts. Representatives of thousands of farmers (and others) were also cut in on the deal.

Four public entities composed BGSB: 1) farmer associations under the auspices of MADA; 2) farmer associations under the auspices of the Kemubu Agricultural Development Authority (KADA); 3) the National Farmers' Association; and 4) the National Fishermen's Association. Together they controlled 34 percent.[17] BGSB's largest shareholder, Permatang Jaya Sdn. Bhd., with a 44 percent stake, was owned by Shahidan Kassim. Shahidan had

[15] Interviews, Arifin Tawang, former director of Mardi, Petaling Jaya, February 9, 2015; Fatimah Mohamed Arshad, then director of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Policy Analysis, University of Putra Malaysia, Serdang, February 12, 2015; Kamaruddin bin Dahuli, Director, Rice Industry Division, MADA, Alor Setar, Kedah, March 30, 2017.

[16] Mardi 1989, p. ix; Mardi 1990, pp. iv, 1. These should not be treated as throw-away statements. While such sentiments in welcoming remarks are expected from agriculture ministers, a reading of annual reports from the 1970s, for example, reveals no similar exaltations of accomplishment. The emotional belief of pride had not yet coalesced, while the challenges were being tackled.

[17] "Bernas may see management change with new shareholder," *Business Times*, February 10, 2003 (retrieved via Factiva).

been a state legislator for Perlis when Mahathir asked him to become Chief Minister of the small northwestern state (1995–2008).

Years later, Shahidan recounted to a reporter a conversation he had had with Mahathir that led to his gaining 15 percent of effective control of Bernas: "What has Perlis got? … Perlis is so small, it has nothing … And that is what I told the PM … I wanted to take over the privatisation of Bernas … I told him I am more interested in getting rich."[18] Shahidan's brusque entry at Bernas ruffled feathers among senior LPN staffers. One official explaining why he quit was as telling as Shahidan's comments:

> … what they wanted to do to LPN is criminal. So I just left in disgust. It's not only what they wanted to do that was so wrong. It is also the people who were behind the whole exercise … I personally know Shahidan so I know what type of person he is. He is just out to make money. And he was going to do so at the welfare of the rice farmers.[19]

Beyond Shahidan's party links, Bernas's chairman, Ruhanie Ahmad, was an UMNO parliamentarian, and its managing director, Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed Nor, was a former senior executive at the *New Straits Times* and Fleet Group, a major UMNO holding company. Ibrahim's own company held a 5.5 percent stake in BGSB.[20] Other Bernas minority shareholders included Megat Junid Bin Megat Ayob, a known Mahathir henchman, and Abdul Ghafar Baba. This former minister for agriculture and rural development and deputy prime minister was known for exploiting his political clout for pecuniary gain.[21] Lastly, the Finance Ministry owned a 10 percent golden share in the company, indicating it held veto power over the board's decisions. The ministry held a seat on the board, and after a 1999 reshuffle, as did the ministries of Agriculture, Trade, and Home Affairs. Bernas's ownership and board encapsulated that blending of state, party, and private Malay capital and interests characteristic of Mahathir's lengthy reign.[22]

For Shahidan and partners to "get rich," they had to stimulate Bernas's commercial potential, something that the new management believed the LPN's older bureaucratic leadership was both loath *and* incapable of doing; after all, they were production nationalists, not entrepreneurs.[23]

[18] Free Anwar Campaign 2003. [19] Ibid.
[20] "Corporate: Major Bernas Stake on the Market," *The Edge*, January 27, 2003.
[21] Yoshihara 1988, pp. 168–69; Searle 1999, pp. 128–31.
[22] Bernas 1999, pp. 9–12. Its management team was not solely Malay; about a quarter of its executives were ethnic Chinese.
[23] Interview, Larry Wong Chee Yoong, Kuala Lumpur, September 25, 2013. A 1997 Bernas annual report describes him as Senior Consultant, Office of the Chief Executive (p. 7), and in 1999 Head of Special Projects (p. 14).

Bernas began aggressively buying into Chinese-owned rice industry firms. It acquired a minority stake in the country's largest private miller, Ban Heng Bee Rice Mill, and a majority stake in the Jasmine Food Corporation and Jasmine Rice Mill.[24] Bernas's literature referred to these new relations as "strategic alliances."[25] By 2000, the company had a stake in some 25 businesses.[26] After Bernas signed a joint-venture agreement with an association of about 100 wholesalers, its managing director described his firm's consolidation of a logistics infrastructure as "charting a food highway."[27] Bernas assured milling interests that initially resisted Bernas's overtures that they would not experience supply shortages if they came under Bernas's ownership; the implied threat was made clear. It was equally clear that campaign contributions to the ruling BN coalition would be expected when requested.[28]

Bernas formed joint ventures to facilitate participation in international trade. It signed agreements with rice exporters in Pakistan, Myanmar, Thailand, and Australia and entered into barter-like arrangements with state-owned heavyweights in Vietnam and China. Here, equivalent values of rice and palm oil were to be exchanged.[29] When the 1997/98 Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) struck Malaysia, these arrangements proved beneficial: They ensured access to a reliable supply of affordable foreign rice – for example, rice purchases from Thailand were transacted using the devalued (Malaysian) *ringgit* instead of more expensive US dollars.[30] Unlike in Indonesia and the Philippines, where during the AFC rice prices climbed steeply (Chapters 4 and 5), in Malaysia, they only experienced two price jumps of about 30 percent each.[31]

Despite Bernas's expansion, its share price had trouble gaining traction. It took almost two years for it to return to its late 1997 IPO price of RM2.20. While the economic turmoil of the 1997–98 AFC may have hurt Bernas, investors simply did not find rice and regulation "sexy." One analyst quipped, "How much rice can one eat?"[32]

[24] Bernas 1997, p. 79. [25] Bernas 2000, p. 22.
[26] "Wholesalers the Main Players – Bernas," *Business Times*, January 19, 1998.
[27] "Bernas to Use Supply Network for Distribution of Other Dry Goods a Part of Its Diversification," *The Sun*, June 28, 2000.
[28] Chong 2005. On this phenomenon more broadly in Malaysia, see Gomez (2001).
[29] "Bernas Enters Rice and Palm Oil Agreement with China," *Bernama*, December 30, 1999.
[30] Bernas 1997, p. 15.
[31] "Bernas Expect Improved Earnings," *Business Times*, June 25, 1999; M. Salman 2013.
[32] "Bernas Remain Undervalued While Earnings Swing," *The Sun*, October 22, 2001; "Unsexy Bernas Seeks to Jazz Up Image," *The Edge*, April 1, 2002.

The company's fundamentals, nevertheless, were sound. Population growth of about 2.5 percent, even if slowing, was strong enough to ensure a steady increase in long-term demand. While per capita consumption was down from 124 kilograms per annum in the early 1970s to about 90 kilograms two decades later, it remained robust. To be sure, more prosperous Malaysians were diversifying their diets, but national rice consumption was still estimated to be around two million tons per year.[33] This estimation was aided by the country's millions of official and undocumented migrant laborers. Their prodigious rice consumption habits, even if not officially recorded, partially offset consumption declines among citizens. One study found that if the total number of migrant workers were estimated at four million, and if they solely purchased local rice, their rice consumption would amount to nearly one-quarter of national production in 2014.[34]

Bernas had cornered over half the rice market; about 20 percent of this portion was gained via domestic procurement and milling. The company owned nearly 60 mills, which accounted for slightly above 10 percent of the country's total, and dozens of warehouses.[35] The jewel in Bernas's crown was its 15-year monopoly concession on imports (dating from 1996). Bernas was importing about 35 percent of the national rice supply in a country whose annual population growth (2.5 percent) was comfortably outstripping its annual growth of paddy output (1.4 percent).

Aiding Bernas's bottom line was the sharp increase in the value and volume of rice imports. In the decade following the country's WTO entry, the import volume more than doubled to 908,000 tons and its value nearly tripled to RM857 million (calculated as a three-year average).[36] Bernas benefited from the yawning gap between domestic and foreign prices. On a per-ton basis, imports were priced at about half of domestic production costs. Bernas exploited this difference to mark up its sales of imported rice – in some cases as much as 35 percent.[37] From 1999 to 2001, rice import operations accounted for slightly more than three-quarters of company profits.[38]

As part of the 1996 privatization agreement, the government had mandated that Bernas fulfil certain social obligations that were largely

[33] Selvadurai 1972, p. 57; Roslina 2017, p. 8, figure 1.5; Sarena 2019, p. 170, figure 6.2.
[34] Sarena 2019, p. 181. [35] Bernas 2001, pp. 102–12.
[36] Mohd. Ghazali, Ismail, and Zaiton 2007, p. 146, table 1; Index Mundi website (indexmundi.com; last accessed March 15, 2024).
[37] "USA Rice Identifies Market Challenges in Malaysia," March 12, 2015 (usarice.com; last accessed April 2, 2024).
[38] Bernas 2000, p. 55; Bernas 2001 p. 66.

continuations of LPN duties[39] They encompassed managing the national stockpile, acting as the buyer of last resort, which meant purchasing low-quality rice at an inflated GMP, and administering both the Bumiputera Rice Millers Program, intended to increase Malay equity in the industry, and the Paddy Price Subsidy Scheme.

Bernas was expected to pay for the costs of these noncommercial programs in exchange for the profits earned from its rice import monopoly. As a result, the company's profitability remained limited. In 1999, revenue of RM1.9 billion rendered only RM120.4 million in pretax profits for a profit margin slightly over 6 percent; this figure dipped slightly lower in the subsequent year.[40] Bernas's managing director remarked accordingly: "We make some money, but we don't make much."[41] Still, competitors complained of his company's apparent aim to monopolize the industry. Ibrahim retorted: "That is not our intention. Why should we? … Anyway, the industry is big. A lot of players can participate."[42] The agriculture minister surely appreciated Bernas's industry presence: Since its privatization, he crowed, it had saved the government RM1.5 billion in annual expenditure.[43]

To overcome the perennial rice industry problems of smuggling (especially from bordering Thailand) and of inconsistent earnings owing to fluctuating prices, Bernas continued to diversify, restructure, and expand. In 2001, it purchased a 30 percent stake in the local subsidiary of the Singapore-based Gardenia Bakeries for about RM55 million. Bernas also expanded vertically to improve efficiency and distribution networks by investing in rice estates in Pahang and Sarawak. Horizontally, it ventured into such dry foods as flour, cooking oil, and sugar.[44]

Despite the pursuit of a business strategy of achieving a 50:50 split in rice and nonrice revenue generation, since Bernas's profits were dependent on rice imports, maintaining the national self-sufficiency level in rice for the Third National Agricultural Plan of 1998–2010 at 65 percent favored the corporation.[45] Its vigilant leadership, nonetheless, did not take helpful government treatment for granted. Prior to Mahathir's 2003 resignation, Bernas reportedly struck a marketing and distribution deal

[39] They were first elaborated in the 1994 Padi and Rice Control Act (Act 522), art. 4.
[40] Bernas 1999, pp. 18, 53; Bernas 2000, p. 55.
[41] "Striking a Balance," *Malaysian Business*, July 16, 1997, p.7.
[42] "Commercial and Social Roles," *Corporate World*, August 16, 1997, p. 16.
[43] "Call for Bernas to Play More Significant Role in Markets," *Malaysia Business Times*, March 3, 2000.
[44] "Bernas MD – A Pretty Good Response to Offer," *Business Times*, July 22, 1997; "Bernas Acquires 30 pct Stake in Gardenia," *Bernama*, January 15, 2001; Bernas 2002, pp. 99–104.
[45] Government of Malaysia 1998, p. 51.

with a food manufacturer linked to the family of then-Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Mahathir's hand-picked successor.[46] It was also around this time that Bernas's ownership structure was undergoing changes that would prove more contentious than the company's mid-1990s privatization. Eventually, it would leave the country's rice sector, and hence food security, perilously in the hands of a single tycoon.

Multiple Crises

After more than twenty years in power, Mahathir resigned the premiership in late 2003 and named Abdullah, a senior UMNO figure, his successor. Although not forced into retirement, Mahathir had become a lightning rod for controversy. The corporate rescues he arranged for UMNO-linked businesses, including those of his son, amid the 1997/98 AFC proved unpopular – as did the beating of Anwar Ibrahim by the federal police chief while in detention. Anwar, who doubled as the deputy prime minister and finance minister and was presumed to be Mahathir's heir apparent, had drawn the PM's ire over his intention to pursue IMF orthodoxy in stemming the worsening financial crisis. Monetary discipline, fiscal austerity, and pro-market reforms figured among the policy components of this orthodoxy. Mahathir preferred an unorthodox approach of expansionary spending and capital controls. He was also displeased by what he saw as Anwar's unbridled ambition to replace him as premier. Anwar was sacked from the cabinet in September 1998 and then was detained after speaking at oppositional *Reformasi* (Reform) rallies. (Subsequently, Anwar was sentenced to nine years in jail on sodomy charges.)

For UMNO and Mahathir, the results of the 1999 polls were disappointing: The BN's vote tally dipped about 9 points to 56 percent, and for the first time in decades, UMNO on its own accord was unable to obtain a majority of parliamentary seats. The BN formed a majority government with help from smaller coalition partners, especially those based in East Malaysia.[47]

As Malaysia's first new premier since 1981, the low-key Abdullah unveiled reforms to move out from the overbearing shadow cast by his former abrasive boss. He pledged to clean up government and to restore

[46] Free Anwar Campaign 2003. The company in question was Dewina Food Industries Berhad.

[47] Funston 2000; Pepinsky 2009, pp. 126–27, 133–43; Mahathir 2011, pp. 684–98; Wain 2012, pp. 101, 202–16.

fiscal responsibility, including shelving or delaying the megaprojects that Mahathir was fond of building. By releasing Anwar from jail, he also signaled a more conciliatory approach to interelite conflict.[48] Less well-known was his attempt to revitalize the food-crop sector in order to close the rural-urban income gap that had worsened during the late Mahathir period: The disparity widened from 1:1.81 in 1999 to 1:2.11 in 2004.[49] A surprising production nationalist, Abdullah bet that such a revival might return rural Malay voters to UMNO. In the 1999 elections, PAS had captured the rural states of Kelantan and also Terengganu.[50]

The measly paddy growth target of 0.2 percent per annum set in the eighth Malaysia Plan (2001–05) had adduced Mahathir's persistent indifference toward the sector. In contrast, Abdullah's five-year plan (2006–10) targeted 2.3 percent, to be achieved by enhancing productivity through improved irrigation and by building more farm-to-market roads.[51] The influence of production nationalism was experiencing a revival. To reach this ambitious target, the new premier needed to improve local public service delivery – such capacity had deteriorated under Mahathir[52] – and to have the necessary time and authority to implement his programs. In the end, as a weak premier, Abdullah had neither.

His governance approach demonstrated more continuity with that of his predecessor in the cultivation of native son tycoons for political purposes, although the new PM's patronage network was less expansive than Mahathir's or even those of other UMNO rivals.[53] Still, he did forge a relationship with Syed Mokhtar Albukhary, then Malaysia's wealthiest *bumiputera* businessman (see Figure 3.1).

Syed Mokhtar was born of humble origins in Alor Setar, Kedah in 1951. According to an authorized biography, he began as a small trader and later obtained an LPN license to participate in the rice trade. As a *bumiputera* in a Chinese-dominated field, he received generous help from LPN officials. He continued to take advantage of NEP-inspired *bumiputera* government programs to secure loans and supply contracts from the likes of such pro-Malay entities as Felda and the Defense Ministry. He expanded into manufacturing and in the mid-1970s befriended Muhyiddin Yassin, a future prime minister who then was managing a government supply company. Syed Mokhtar also worked closely with Shahidan Kassim, then FAMA's director. By the 1980s, Syed Mokhtar had interests in shipping, construction, palm oil, sugar, and property

[48] Chander 2013.
[49] Government of Malaysia 2006, p. 360. Sultan Nazrin Shah (2017) found that the less urbanized the state, the greater the impact of increased rice production on reducing poverty (p. 397, figure 8.7).
[50] Verma 2000. [51] Government of Malaysia 2006, pp. 91 (table 3–4) and p. 95.
[52] Ibid., chapter 26. [53] Weiss 2006, p. 180.

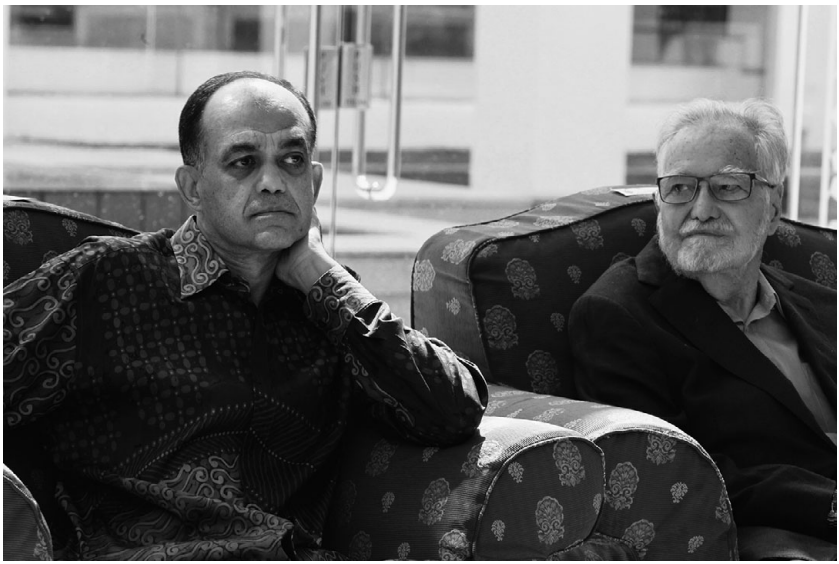


Figure 3.1 Syed Mokhtar Albukhary (Left).
(Credit/*The Edge Malaysia*)

development, especially in Johor, where Muhyiddin served a decade-long stint as chief minister starting in the mid-1980s. Syed Mokhtar's ascent to the pinnacle of Malaysia's corporate world, however, would need a way cleared by the destruction of the 1997–98 AFC.[54]

Mahathir and Syed Mokhtar first met reportedly in 1997, when the former tasked him with building an Islamic civilization museum in then the nation's capital.[55] Having passed the test-case with aplomb, Syed Mokhtar earned the autocratic prime minister's trust, even as the AFC began battering Malaysia's economy. By early 1998, the *ringgit* had lost almost 50 percent of its value; by mid-year, the stock market had shed about US$225 billion or some 70 percent of its valuation; and by year's end, GDP had contracted 7.5 percent.[56] Companies owned by UMNO cronies of Mahathir and other ministers that incurred colossal debts were provided with state bailouts. Notable examples included Halim Saad's Renong and Yahaya Ahmad's DRB-HICOM Holdings, entities that Mahathir had designated pioneers of the country's large-scale industrialization for which he had pined.[57]

[54] Mohanlall 2012, pp. 43–44, 48–49, 57, 72–73. [55] Ibid., p. 87.
[56] Athukorala 1998, p. 81.
[57] "Malaysia's Chosen One," *Time* (Asia), June 24, 2002, pp. 16–18; Gomez 2001, pp. 87–90, table 3.2; Jomo 2003, chapter 19; Rodan 2005, pp. 120–23. DRB-HICOM: Diversified Resources Berhad – Heavy Industries Corporation of Malaysia Berhad.

Although distressed, Syed Mokhtar's firms were less entangled in the tentacles of federal political power and thus were less exposed financially. They survived the AFC, bruised but not beaten.[58] If pro-market reformers had hoped that the trying experience of the AFC would convince the country's leadership to dismantle the dense, collusive networks among UMNO, the state, and big business, the budding Mahathir-Syed Mokhtar relationship would disappoint them.[59] This new pairing was also fortified by the PM's fallout with his long-time right-hand man, Daim Zainuddin. Daim had designed the policy packages that lifted the economy from the doldrums of the mid-1980s and subsequently remained Mahathir's trusted economic adviser.[60] In mid-2001, he resigned from his post as finance minister over the way in which the government took over the companies of some of his protégés, firms that subsequently came under the control of Syed Mokhtar.[61]

In 2002, Syed Mokhtar bought the UMNO investment fund National Corporation, which became part of his Tradewinds Corporation, another government firm that had been privatized.[62] By gaining control of other such prominent entities as DRB-HICOM and the carmaker Proton, Syed Mokhtar was being tasked with rescuing indebted companies or reviving stalled projects. On accusations of being a new breed of crony, the typically media-shy mogul responded: "What crony? I have to be a reverse crony to be getting troubled projects."[63]

Around this time, Syed Mokhtar began acquiring shares in Bernas. In 2003, a company understood to be associated with him bought about 18 percent of equity interest in BGSB. (Because of AFC-induced debt, BGSB was forced to sell some of its Bernas shares, reducing its ownership to about one-quarter.[64]) Thus began a process that would take more than a decade for Syed Mokhtar to complete – to acquire the publicly listed rice corporation in order to delist it from the (renamed) Bursa Malaysia, the country's stock exchange.

[58] Mohanlall 2012, pp. 105, 107. [59] Case 2005; Rodan 2005, p. 136.

[60] Gomez and Jomo 1997, pp. 53–56; "Consummate Insider," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 19, 1998, pp. 16–17; Searle 1999, pp. 135–42; Wain 2012, pp. 119–25.

[61] Daim was also displeased with Mahathir's rescue of his son's firms and his lack of a succession strategy (Rodan 2005, pp.132–34; "No Fallout with Mahathir," malaysiakini .com, February 26, 2014; last accessed October 23, 2023).

[62] Adam and Cavendish 1995.

[63] "Syed Mokhtar's Coming-Out Party," *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 29, 2003, p. 41. Mahathir's business-patronage network was not dismantled following his retirement. This dismantling, common in Malaysia, happened to Anwar following his fall from grace.

[64] Bernas 1999, p. 86; "G. Bersepadu yet to finalise Bernas stake buy," *Business Times*, June 27, 2003.

As we saw in Chapter 2 during the 1973–74 rice crisis, soaring international prices caused Malaysia's private traders to temporize making purchases. In early 2008, it was Bernas's turn. The firm reduced rice imports by as much as 40 percent in the face of a tripling of international prices from late 2007 to May 2008, when unprecedentedly they broke through the US$1000/metric ton barrier. Bernas's (in) actions, however, drew the government's ire. While stockpiles remained in large part adequate – domestic rice prices did rise more than a quarter but only temporarily[65]– public worries over the availability of rice percolated. Already reeling from an electoral thumping in March of that year when the BN lost its two-thirds majority in parliament for the first time since 1969, the government insisted that Bernas resume its regular importations.[66] The company held firm, however, infuriating government officials.[67] They felt aggrieved because Bernas had been profiting generously from its import operations – on average about RM135.8 million per year from 2004 to 2007. As Bernas's pretax profits during these years averaged RM161 million per year, it meant that the share of the rice import business amounted to about 84 percent of profits.[68] Moreover, as recently as 2007, the government had extended Bernas's valuable import monopoly license another five years. Seeing themselves as victims rather than culprits of the crisis, Bernas staffers sought to shift blame onto hoarding by "private" (read Chinese) dealers, millers, and wholesalers.[69]

So, the government procured rice directly from the Chinese and Thai governments. By late 2008, the crisis had abated, but government-Bernas relations remained strained. Interested parties sensed an opportunity. Eager Malay business associations eyed a piece of the valuable importing business, and pro-farmer nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the Malay miller association called for LPN's return. Its nonprofit business model, these groups surmised, would better serve their interests. Critics further argued that the crisis had exposed Bernas's true colors as an entity that prioritized profits over people and over the national interest. Put differently, Bernas was a threat to food security.[70] In response, the

[65] M. Salman 2013, p. 16.
[66] Two-thirds majority in Parliament is required to amend the constitution.
[67] Interview, Larry Wong Chee Yoong, former Bernas executive, Kuala Lumpur, September 25, 2013.
[68] Bernas 2007, p. 6; "Big Money: Why Privatising Bernas Was Wrong," *The Edge Malaysia*, May 19, 2008.
[69] "Bernas Blames Private Millers for Rice Shortage," *Bernama*, May 8, 2008; M. Salman 2013, p. 16.
[70] "Prospects for a Nationalised Bernas," *The Edge Malaysia*, July 21, 2008.

government ordered a study to explore nationalizing the industry, although the study commission dismissed this option. Even though government-Bernas relations were still taut, renationalization would have amounted to admission that privatizing the LPN in the first place constituted a grave error in policy.[71]

Autarkic Aspirations

In a win for the production nationalists, following the 2008 rice crisis, the federal government seemed inclined to increase autarky in food provision, principally by jettisoning the longstanding policy of maintaining rice production at about 65 percent of domestic requirements. The gradual lowering of the self-sufficiency level from a peak of 100 percent in the 1970s had enabled more agricultural lands to be used for high-value-added, agro-export commodities, especially palm oil. This export diversification drive intensified after the country joined the WTO in 1995.[72] Nevertheless, after the 2008 crisis, the government raised the rice self-sufficiency target to 80 percent by 2011 and to 100 percent for the eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016–2020).[73] Although achieving the latter would likely bankrupt Bernas, econometric models showed the virtual impossibility of realizing this target.[74]

The federal government began by expanding the area devoted to paddy sowing and by reinvesting in cultivation to raise yields. From 2008 to 2014, the former grew almost five percent compared to the near seven percent contraction of 2001 to 2005.[75] In 2012, PM Najib Razak, Abdullah's successor, unveiled plans to establish four new granaries, officially known as integrated agriculture development areas, or IADAs.[76] Totalling 19,000 hectares, they were the first additions to the country's eight granaries since their initial designation in the mid-1980s. Two projects of combined nearly 12,000 hectares were located in Pahang. Pahang is among Peninsular Malaysia's poorer states and Najib's home state, where he began his career in politics.[77]

[71] "Kedudukan Bernas ke Kabinet," *Berita Minggu*, August 16, 2009; Dawe and Slayton 2010, p. 23; Tey 2010, p. 506.
[72] Pletcher 1990; Fatimah 2007, p. 12, table 3; Athukorala and Loke 2009, p. 204; Sultan Nazrin Shah 2017, p. 167, figure 6.2.
[73] Government of Malaysia 2011, p. 23; Government of Malaysia 2016, p. 58.
[74] Yogambigai, Khalid, and Munusamy 2015; Sarena 2019, p. 11. figure 1.12.
[75] USDA 2014; Sarena 2019, p. 28, figure 2.2.
[76] This does not pertain to MADA and KADA (Chapter 2) that predate the official designation of IADAs.
[77] The output from these two granaries was added to government statistics in 2014. Granaries were opened in East Malaysia, one each in the states of Sabah and Sarawak.

In the mature rice economies of Kedah and Perlis, a yield-boosting, land consolidation program was accelerated. To overcome problems associated with uneconomic land holdings, rice estate management projects have existed in Malaysia since the 1980s. With a target of 50,000 noncontiguous hectares by 2020, this latest attempt was the largest thus far. By 2017, over 30,000 hectares had been consolidated. Production nationalists considered MADA's estate program a game changer in the country's attempt to reach targeted self-sufficiency levels. In mid-2023, the Agriculture Ministry targeted another 30,000 hectares for consolidation.[78]

This MADA-led project invokes that of the Green Revolution's heyday designed to bolster output *and* the economic fortunes of rural Malays for political purposes. This constituency has been a linchpin of UMNO's electoral backing. Consistent with the dictates of APE, its significance has been enhanced by persistent and extensive gerrymandering as well as malapportionment to strengthen its electoral weightage. UMNO was aware that its urban support base was eroding, confirmed by 2008 and 2013 electoral results. For UMNO, the importance of the rural vote was magnifying.[79] In a visit to a rural district in mid-2016, Najib was quoted as shouting to the gathered crowd: "My government will take care of you!"[80]

Yet rural Malaysia is not static; it has undergone significant transformations since the Green Revolution. The number of cultivators relying on income solely derived from paddy has shrunk considerably. Increasingly, individuals of farming households either no longer farm, having moved to towns or cities, or more heavily draw from nonfarm sources of income.[81] But neither has the countryside experienced complete deagrarianization.[82] Continuing economic and spatial integration of the rural and the urban, or rural urbanization, has led to some urban dwellers to try their hand in part-time or weekend farming, encouraged by generous paddy production subsidies (of about RM300 per ton.[83])

"Pekan, Rompin Kawasan Jelapang -Padi Baru," malaysiakini.com; May 17, 2010 (last accessed October 23, 2023); MADA 2016; "KB Rice Project: Too Early to Determine Success or Failure," dailyexpress.com, July 10, 2020 (last accessed October 23, 2023).

[78] MADA 2016, p. 30; Interview, Kamaruddin bin Dahuli, Director, Rice Industry Division, MADA, Alor Setar, Kedah, March 30, 2017; "Pilot Paddy Farming Project with Mada to Start Sept: Mat Sabu," thevibes.com, June 11, 2023 (last accessed March 15, 2024).

[79] Saravanamuttu 2015.

[80] "Malaysia Paddy Fields Are Najib's Battlefield to Woo Voters," bloomberg.com, June 20, 2016 (last accessed October 23, 2023).

[81] Koninck and Raiha 2012, pp. 61, figure 4.1, 64, figure 4.17.

[82] Rigg 2001, pp. 291–95.

[83] Preston and Ngah 2012; Thompson 2015.

In accounting for the persistence of the smallholding class, Malaysia, as elsewhere in its economy, has relied heavily on foreign labor.[84] In the agricultural sector, which has suffered acute labor shortages due to rural-to-urban migration, the official number of foreign workers from 2000 to 2015 more doubled to nearly half a million.[85] Interviews on the subject give the impression that nearly all paddy producers of all sizes employ foreign labor in some manner, with Bangladeshis, Nepalese, and especially Indonesians among them.

Raising productivity via such yield growth programs as the Muda estate project is a more complex enterprise than simply importing greater quantities of rice. The former requires increased coordination among many actors across ministries and agencies, as well as the dispersal, reception, and implementation of technical knowledge.[86] As trade advocates are at pains to point out, it is less costly and more efficient to buy the country's rice requirements on the world market, which Malaysia has done more or less consistently for over a century. Although in apparent contrast to its production programs, Najib's government also remained committed to this enduring policy. Notably, it extended Bernas's import monopoly license another ten years, starting from 2011.

Reprivatization of Bernas

The extension was hardly in doubt. For years, Syed Mokhtar, a top UMNO donor, had been accumulating shares in Bernas to take it private.[87] (It was formally delisted from the stock exchange in 2014.) For the UMNO-led government, it preferred Syed Mokhtar to his apparent rival, the ethnic Chinese tycoon, Tan Chin Nam.[88] Tan quietly had been using his Hong Kong–based Wang Tak Corporation to accumulate shares in Bernas. When it was finally reported that Wang Tak's control had breached 30 percent, politicians demanded that the government block Bernas from being illegally owned by a "foreigner." While the government obliged, it risked being seen as acting in a hostile manner

[84] Rigg, Salamanca, and Thompson 2016.
[85] The official figure fluctuates. During this period, it peaked at over 625,000 in 2013 (Government of Malaysia 2015).
[86] On this dilemma more broadly, see Ricks and Doner (2021).
[87] "Umno's Chief Crony," malaysia-today.net, October 28, 2012 (last accessed October 24, 2023).
[88] Tan, like Robert Kuok, diversified overseas to avoid NEP restrictions (Gomez and Jomo 1997, p. 43). Tan's son, Tan Boon Seng, was executive chairman of Lee Hing Development Ltd., Wak Tang's parent company ["Big Money – Unfounded Fears of Wang Tak in Bernas," theedgemalaysia.com, August 9, 2009 (updated August 21, 2014; last accessed October 24, 2023)].

toward foreign investment, which would tarnish its reputation for having an open economy.[89] In the end, the federal government greenlighted Syed Mokhtar's purchase in 2009, through a network of his companies, of Wang Tak's shares and, subsequently, that of Bernas.[90]

Nor would Syed Mokhtar or the government allow pesky minority shareholders to throw a last-minute spanner in the works. Some of them, reportedly including Shahidan, wished to retain their stakes in order to receive valuable dividends predicated on the company's long-term growth.[91] When minority shareholders were refused this option, they turned to the courts with no success. After some arm-twisting, federal farmers and fisher organizations (Nafas and Nekmat, respectively) agreed to a lump sum payment in addition to the buy-out price of their shares. Other minority shareholders did not receive such assurances.[92]

The federal government bestowed upon Syed Mokhtar more favors in connection with his corporate takeover. In 2013, the country's competition commission ruled against a collaborative arrangement between the country's two largest airlines, AirAsia and Malaysia Airlines, for violating the 2010 Competition Act. It fined them RM10 million (US$3 million) apiece.[93] Despite expectations, the commission never issued a ruling on Bernas's rice import monopoly. Then, in 2016, the government permitted Bernas to slash its stockpiling requirement of 100 days of supply roughly in half, saving the company around RM30 million a year.[94]

The timing of reports on Syed Mokhtar's delisting plans for Bernas had done the magnate little favor. As reports coincided with the 2013 elections, the billionaire became easy fodder for accusations of crony capitalism, patrimonialism, and money politics, for which UMNO has actively pursued for decades. Lim Guan Eng, the secretary general of the then-opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP), questioned the deal.[95] Anwar Ibrahim, the then leader of the People's Justice Party (Parti Keadilan Rakyat, or PKR), asked accusingly:

[89] On such a reputation, see Adam and Cavendish (1995) and Athukorala and Loke (2009, esp. p. 218).
[90] "Bernas to Buy Back Parts of Shares Owned by Hong Kong Company," *Bernama*, July 31, 2009.
[91] Interview, Ahmad Shafarie, Nafas (Pertumbuhan Peladang Kebangsaan; National Farmers Organization) Resources Administration Officer, Petaling Jaya, January 12, 2017. Nekmat: Persatuan Nelayan Kebangasaan (Association of National Fishermen).
[92] "New Twist to Refreshed Offer for Bernas Shares," theedgemarkets.com, February 6, 2014 (last accessed October 24, 2023).
[93] "MAS and AirAsia – the MyCC Proposed Decision," thestar.com.my, September 21, 2013 (last accessed October 24, 2023).
[94] Fatimah and Tey 2019, pp. 31–32; Sarena 2019, p. 150.
[95] "Guan Eng: Ensure Economic Survival to Win Putrajaya," themalaysianinsider.com, January 8, 2012 (lib.perdana.org.my; last accessed October 24, 2023).

Why has the government digressed from its original intent in the formation of Bernas, which was to protect the interests of bumiputra farmers, distributors and workers? … . Is equity ownership for these people not worthy of the government's protection? Why should the ultra-wealthy, politically-connected individuals get all the privileges?[96]

Beyond the theatricality of an electoral campaign, other concerns over Bernas's reprivatization were raised, among which the lack of transparency was paramount. As a private entity, Bernas was no longer obligated to produce a public annual report, and negotiations with the government could be held behind closed doors. What limits were placed on how Tradewinds, the publicly listed conglomerate into which Bernas was folded, could treat Bernas? Shielded from public scrutiny, it could strip Bernas of prized assets and relist a leaner version (a common ploy among Malaysian corporate titans), or it could redeploy Bernas's enviable cash flow to pay down the debt of other companies in Syed Mokhtar's corporate empire. Reportedly, soon after the takeover, RM700 million from Bernas's coffers was transferred to Tradewinds.[97]

As accusations mounted, the federal government felt compelled to respond. In the past, it may have brushed the criticism aside, but UMNO was no longer the dominant hegemon of yesteryear. In the 2013 elections, although the ruling BN coalition retained a majority of parliamentary seats due to manipulation of the electoral system, it had lost the popular vote by 3.5 percentage points to the People's Alliance. (This coalition, known in Malay as Pakatan Rakyat or PR, comprised PKR, DAP, and PAS.)

The agriculture minister sought to clarify the circumstances surrounding the takeover.[98] Ismail Sabri Yaakob announced that he held a letter from Syed Mokhtar pledging the tycoon's commitment to the social obligations that are central to possession of the monopoly import license.[99] Since the minister had essentially admitted that continuing Bernas-government cooperation appeared to rest on a private, nonlegally binding document, his attempt at cooling the controversy missed the mark. Bernas aggravated matters by denying any knowledge of a written

[96] "Privatising Bernas Only Feeds Syed Mokhtar's Monopoly, Says Anwar," malaymail.com, November 12, 2013 (last accessed October 24, 2023). "Bumiputra" is in the original.

[97] "RAM Ratings Downgrades Ratings of Bernas' RM750m Notes," thestar.com.my, June 4, 2015 (last accessed October 24, 2023).

[98] In 2004, the ministry's name was changed to the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry.

[99] "Bernas Boss' Pledge to Farmers Is a Secret, Says Ismail Sabri," theedgemarkets.com, March 27, 2014 (last accessed October 25, 2023).

pledge. In a limp attempt to rescue himself from the predicament, Ismail retorted: "Sometimes there are things that Bernas can and cannot reveal."[100]

Ismail stirred further controversy by launching a campaign by the name of "Jihadist [War] Against Middlemen" (*Jihad Memerangi Orang Tengah*). His veiled attack on Chinese traders, which included a fruitless boycott of their products, turned out to be not so veiled. The PR opposition condemned the minister for his racist remarks. Eventually, Ismail was compelled to apologize for stoking ethnic tensions.[101]

To demonstrate that the minister had the agricultural Malay community's best interest at heart, he unveiled a significant rise in the paddy guaranteed minimum price (GMP) from RM750 to RM1200 per metric ton for Peninsular Malaysia. The price hike caught many by surprise, including Bernas. Ismail did not consult with the country's paddy buyer of last resort, even though it would be required to make the necessary adjustments in the field and implement the minister's popularity ploy. Expectedly, and perhaps why he opted to forgo Bernas's input, Bernas objected to the price hike. Since farmgate prices were well above the GMP at the time, it queried the rationale behind the price change. It also worried about its impact on aggravating smuggling from Thailand, a bugaboo that has perpetually threatened Bernas's bottom-line. (According to Bernas, perhaps as much as one-fifth of rice consumed in Malaysia is smuggled from Thailand.[102]) For Bernas, Ismail's stunt was another example of short-term political calculations interfering with the studied operations and long-run interests of a professionally run business.[103]

The ingratitude Ismail received from Bernas was expected; his inability to inspire appreciation from the intended community of beneficiaries was less anticipated. Farmer groups noted that the raise would be easily offset by higher deductions for moisture content that millers would apply to new transactions. While contention over what farmers perceive as unfair deductions has been longstanding, deduction rates were on the rise. For farmer groups, not only has Bernas failed to address the problem, but also its agents and millers have been complicit in the injustice.[104]

[100] "Bernas' Delisting Won't Affect Rice Industry, Says Ismail Sabri," theedgemarkets.com, March 19, 2014 (last accessed October 25, 2023).
[101] "Ismail Sabri 'Regrets' His Comments," thestar.com.my, February 13, 2015 (last accessed October 25, 2023).
[102] Fatimah and Tey 2019, p. 41.
[103] Anonymous interview, Bernas manager, Petaling Jaya, July 27, 2015.
[104] Wong 1981, pp. 6–7, 10–11; World Bank 1988, p. iv; Interview, Dr. Anni Mitin, SEACON Regional Director, Kuala Lumpur, March 11, 2015; Rawaida, Fatimah, and Abdulla 2017; Fatimah 2018, pp. 24–25. I also have in my possession a letter (in

Growers preferred help in the upgrading of inputs. Complaints included being forced to use low-quality fertilizers distributed from the ministry, via Nafas and local farmer organizations (Lembaga Pertubuhan Peladang). As the apex body of the Area Farmers' Associations (AFAs), Nafas has been a key cog in the ministry's expansive patronage network. As of 2019, its members encompassed 14 State Farmers' Associations and 279 AFAs with a membership of over 920,000.[105] In addition to having owned a minority share in Bernas, Nafas oversaw the annual distribution of the hefty annual fertilizer subsidy (of about RM460 million, or about US$140 million).

The Chinese Rice Millers Association of Kedah agrees with the farmers on the declining quality of paddy, but its millers blame the generous subsidies producers receive that repress their incentive to produce a quality product. Regulations allow millers to apply deductions for moisture content, dirt, spoiled paddy, and other impurities. Official schedules cap deductions at about 27 percent, although maximums and exact ratios between deductions and moisture content are subject to change. Despite reports that real deductions can be twice the maximum allowed, the millers deny this. They insist that such deductions invite a cascade of farmer complaints and thus endless nettlesome government inquiries. Nor do they deny that steep deductions are often warranted.[106]

Private millers hold Bernas in low regard. They accuse their rival of competing on an uneven field playing, thanks to government-backed monopoly profits (from imports), and claim that Bernas's operations enjoy margins two to three times that which their mills earn. These private operators pine for the halcyon days of the 1980s, when their parents ran the mills: Good quality paddy was plentiful, the LPN was not considered a competitor, and Mahathir's indifference toward the sector left millers largely to their own devices.[107]

Ismail's final controversy concerned a corruption scandal that exposed the rot that had infected the rice sector's marketing and regulatory system. The scandal had its origins in the aftermath of the 2008 rice crisis regarding a subsidized rice scheme. The scheme and the rice associated with it were known as ST15, derived from *Super Tempatan* (Super Local variety) and from (low-grade) 15 percent broken grains.

form of a Word document) by a farmer NGO (Gabeta – Gabungan Membela Petani), dated July 1, 2014, addressed to the minister concerning these matters.

[105] Fatimah 2023.

[106] Group interviews, Chinese Rice Millers Association of Kedah, Alor Setar, May 8–9, 2015. The association might formally include the state of Perlis.

[107] Ibid. It must be stressed that they may recollect the past selectively.

About 3 million low-income families were eligible to purchase up to 20 kilograms a month of ST15 at specialized outlets for between RM1.65 and RM1.80 per kilogram, depending on the location. When farmers protested that millers were refusing to buy their paddy, and millers in turn hollered that wholesalers were turning away their polished product due to the oversupply of cheap rice, a former Bernas official exposed a scam that was gumming the works.[108]

It began with ministry officials selling the ST15 licenses. Of the RM750 subsidy for each ton of ST15, reportedly RM450 went toward purchasing the rice, with the rest divided among officials. Rather than sell ST15 rice to intended targets, traders mixed it with higher grades and sold the repackaged mixture as pure high-grade rice to other traders, retailers, restaurants, resorts, and similar establishments. Such malfeasance was committed with increasing frequency not only to recoup licensing costs, but also because margins had become impossibly tight owing to Ismail's GMP increase. Traders and millers were being squeezed from both ends. In fact, a sizable number of private mills, especially smaller ones owned by Malays, were forced to close. These closures in turn lifted Bernas's share of the country's milling business.[109] In the end, the rise in GMP benefited Bernas's commercial interests, although initially company officials complained about Ismail's price hikes.

Twice the country's auditor-general raised red flags over the ministry's misuse of ST15 funds and its appalling lack of regulatory oversight. Having spent an estimated RM3.4 billion (US$1 billion) on the program from 2009 to 2015, the federal government terminated it in 2016 on account of public uproar over the scandal.[110] Ismail was subsequently demoted to head the less lucrative Rural and Regional Development Ministry. (Little did he know then that his political career soon would be resurrected to unexpected heights.)

Old Debates Revisited

ST15 was not the only rice-related program to experience a cut in state support. In his 2017 budget speech, PM Najib announced a whopping 60 percent reduction in annual paddy and rice subsidies and incentives (from about RM2.1 billion to RM1.3 billion). The cutback, though

[108] "Subsidy Abuse Leading to Rice Oversupply," malaysiakini.com, January 15, 2015 (last accessed October 24, 2023).
[109] Fatimah and Tey, 2019, pp. 15–18, 32; Sarena 2019, pp. 142, 162, figure 5.11.
[110] "What Happened to Spending on ST15 Rice?" malaysiakini.com, November 4, 2015 (last accessed October 24, 2023).

Figure 3.2 Rice Mill, Malaysia.
(Credit/*Goh Seng Chong/Bloomberg via Getty Images*)

steep, was not without warning. A year earlier, his government introduced a contentious goods and service tax (GST) to raise revenue and to lessen dependence on oil-derived taxes, which were amounting to about 40 percent of the state's tax revenue base. And softening oil prices were slowing economic growth. Growth registered at 4.8 percent, below government expectations of 6.0 percent, and below the real average growth rate from 2010 to 2015. As such, austerity measures were anticipated.[111]

Yet the large paddy and rice subsidy drawdown seemed to undermine renewed commitment to improving domestic food provision. As covered in Chapters 1 and 2, subsidies long have been integral to Malaysia's rice sector. For about 155,000 cultivators in granaries, the federal government had been spending roughly half of the Agriculture Ministry's budget, or over RM2 billion (US$570 million), annually on subsidies. Programs featured a paddy price support scheme (RM480 million), fertilizer subsidies (RM465 million), a paddy production incentive (RM563 million), rice price scheme (RM528 million), and others.[112] These figures exclude substantial monies expended on discrete projects (such as the new granaries) or on relevant agencies (such as MADA).

[111] Bank Negara Malaysia 2016. [112] Fatimah 2018, pp. 11, 16, table 1.

No other crop in Malaysia remotely has received as much government assistance.[113]

In the end, most budget cuts were restored; the final figure represented a still significant 15 percent reduction.[114] The episode retrained the public spotlight on the role subsidies continue to play in the sector, and more acutely on the difficulties that the country's diminishing yet nevertheless sizable number of paddy producers face. Even with input subsidies and output incentives covering about 60 percent of total production costs per hectare, most cash-poor cultivators remained trapped in debt and mired in poverty, at least by Malaysian standards. The regressive features of the subsidies favoring larger farmers that were noted in the 1980s remained in effect.[115] In the granaries, average income from on-farm *and* off-farm activities was still about a third below the national GDP per capita average. With less access to input subsidies, output incentives, and quality facilities, the 40,000 or so paddy growers outside the granaries ordinarily earn even less.[116]

At least two factors have kept the problem of paddy farmer poverty partially shielded from public scrutiny. One has been constraints placed on civil society. Ethnically segmented, Malaysia's civil society had struggled to distance itself from a heavy-handed semiauthoritarian state that rather freely wielded draconian legal instruments against perceived opponents (more so than outright physical repression.) Of late, civil society has made strides by transcending ethnic divisions through the championing of such causes as migrant workers' rights and the environment. These advances have been aided by the state's increased tolerance of dissent since Mahathir's (first) retirement in 2003. Yet these trends apply more to urban than rural movements. Domineering state intervention in the agricultural sector has in the main kept cultivator-civil society interactions low.[117] There have been some cracks in the edifice, however. A handful of organizations has exploited the space created by new media in Malaysia to boost their visibility and articulate interests on behalf of the farmers. GABETA, a coalition of fifteen farmer NGOs, is one example.[118] It helped promote growers' concerns in the

[113] Athukorala and Loke 2009.
[114] "RM1.9b Subsidies in 2016 for 155,000 Paddy Farmers," thesundaily.my, November 21, 2016 (thesun.my/archive; last accessed March 15, 2024).
[115] Roslina 2017, p. 155; Fatimah 2018, p. 55.
[116] MADA 2016, p. 26, figure 11; Sarena 2019, pp. 96, 99; Government of Malaysia 2018, p. 180; table 8.2; Fatimah 2018, pp. 37–39; Fatimah and Tey, 2019, p. 29. Exceptions include the Chinese paddy cultivators of Sekinchan of coastal Selangor.
[117] Jesudason 1995; Rodan 2005, pp. 113, 162–65; Weiss 2006, pp. 109–26; Fatimah 2018, p. 21; Khoo, Selvanathan, and Lickel 2021.
[118] Gabungan Membela Hak Petani, or Association of the Defense of Farmers' Rights.

debate over rising paddy deductions by millers. When one of GABETA's constituent members, Padi Rescue, continued to press its case against Bernas, the latter threatened to sue for defamation.[119]

A second factor was government touting of unashamedly low poverty figures of below one percent. Although scepticism was longstanding among government critics, concerns over the antiquated methodology the state deployed to construct its poverty line index (PLI) began to be raised in more mainstream circles. With support from quarters even within the government, efforts to readjust the PLI gained pace. In 2020, the PLI was revised to 5.6 percent for 2019. Critics insisted the real figure was higher.[120]

Regardless, it would be difficult to defend the financial sustainability or effectiveness of state-led paddy and rice subsidy programs. Although the government's fiscal deficit prior to 2020 had been steadily improving, it still was averaging over three percent of GDP. Much of this deficit was attributable to manifold subsidy programs.[121] Quite damningly, myriad subsidies have not led to productivity gains in paddy, even in a country with an admirable track record of development capacity.[122] From 2013 to 2018, at the national level, average yields remained largely flat. Over the same period, the rice self-sufficiency level rose per annum an anaemic half a percentage point to almost 69 percent, a far cry from the goal of 100 percent by 2020 set in the eleventh Malaysia Plan.[123]

Market economists in or researching on Malaysia interpret such data as incontrovertible evidence to eliminate the subsidies, shrink the sector, and raise import volumes. Moderates among them support retaining more productive granaries as the one overseen by MADA.[124] Others, neither market liberals nor production nationalists, also agree that subsidy cuts are long overdue. They prefer expending public monies based on productivity-enhancing measures than being driven by political imperatives. They point to more investment in infrastructure, even in

[119] "Withdraw Suit Against Padi Rescue, Opposition MPs Tell Bernas," themalaysiainsight.com, November 29, 2017 (last accessed October 24, 2023).

[120] Gomez and Jomo 1997, p. 28; Ragayah 2007; Khoo and Khoo 2012, p. 6, table 1.1; Merdeka Centre 2017, slide 5; "Statistics Dept: Malaysia's New Poverty Line Income Is RM2,208, Over 400k Households Considered Poor," malaymail.com, July 10, 2020 (last accessed March 24, 2024).

[121] Available at tradingeconomics.com/malaysia/government-budget (last accessed October 24, 2023); Fatimah 2018, p. 17.

[122] Rock 2017, chapter 1; Amanina and Schmillen 2020.

[123] Government of Malaysia 2018, p. 7, table 2.1.1, p. 167; table 7.1.

[124] Atukorala and Loke 2009; Vengedasalam, Harris, and MacAulay 2011; Alavi, Htenas, Kopicki, *et al.*, 2012, pp. 1–31; Roslina 2017, pp. 159–67; Sarena 2019, p. v.

nongranary areas, and in research and development of improved machinery and seed varietals. Gains in productivity, it is hoped, will compensate for reduced production subsidies.[125]

Some experts recommend promoting more private sector participation through contract farming or improving supply chains by using real-time data innovations.[126] Nearly all agree that meaningful reform begins with shrinking Bernas's large footprint on the sector. Putting aside the issue of the monopoly import license (to which we will return below), the firm's dominant domestic presence hinders local competition by limiting the number of market players. Consider the increased concentration in milling. Before the LPN's privatization in the mid-1990s, there were almost 300 mills operating in the country; by 2015, that number had been almost halved.[127] Especially hurt have been medium-to-small-scale Malay private businesses, crowded out from input and output supply chains. Without the will to enact meaningful reform, it was feared that "more of the same behavior" would perpetuate an untenable and unjust status quo.[128]

In situations of pervasive vested interests, it can require an exogenous shock to jumpstart difficult reform. In this case, neither these agricultural experts nor the country's political observers could foresee the imminence of such a jolt.[129] And since the rice sector is as politicized as any other industry, if not more so, a charge *nearly* had enough force to induce real reform in Malaysia's rice trade, and beyond. Fittingly, it emanated from the country's competitive electoral arena.

Reform Averted

In May 2018, Malaysia's opposition coalition, now known as the Alliance of Hope (Pakatan Harapan, PH), secured a historic victory by trouncing the incumbent BN. The 12-percentage-point margin of victory ensured that no amount of electoral distortion could deny the opposition from forming a government. The PH's four major parties – PKR, DAP, Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, PPBM), and National Trust Party (Amanah) – captured nearly 53 percent of the seats in Parliament.

This is not the place to exhaustively evaluate the reasons for the electoral stunner. The mounting viability of an interethnic opposition coalition, born out of the AFC reform demonstrations that were

[125] Fatimah 2016; Fatimah 2018, pp. 54–58.
[126] Sarena 2019, pp. ii–iii.
[127] Fatimah 2018; Fatimah and Tey 2019, p. 39.
[128] Fatimah 2016.
[129] Hutchinson and Lee 2019, esp. p. 3.

encouraged by the sacking and beating of Anwar, was instrumental. Although these mobilizations failed to spawn regime change as counterparts had achieved in Jakarta, they gave rise to a new generation of politically aware citizens and activists, imbued with a sense of duty and purpose to put the national interest above ethnically based particularistic concerns. This political fallout also provided the opposition with a recognizable Malay face, that of Anwar, around which to rally.[130] The indicative electoral advances the opposition coalitions had made in the 2008 and 2013 polls were noted above.

Two interwoven contingent factors finally tipped the scale in favor of the opposition. One was public reaction to the 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) megascandal that emerged in 2015. Nearly RM16 billion (approximately US$4.4 billion) had been siphoned from 1MDB, a strategic investment fund of the Finance Ministry. At first, it was believed that Najib, who also held the finance portfolio, used some portion of this vast sum to secure the BN's 2013 victory. When it was revealed that anywhere between US$700 million and US$1 billion was held in Najib's own bank account, speculation intensified that large amounts were instead spent on personal matters. Reports on the profligate spending by Najib and his wife proliferated. The enormity of sums and Najib's bungled attempts at covering up the malfeasance – for example, his firing of the attorney general – galled Malaysians. They had grown accustomed to public corruption, but this immensity trampled on acceptable norms. Because it also implicated global banks and other financial institutions based in Singapore, the US, Europe, and elsewhere that facilitated and benefited from the money laundering operation, it brought unwanted international attention to the country. Malaysians bristled at inevitable comparisons of Najib's avarice to the kleptocracies of Soeharto and Marcos.[131] Najib stubbornly clung to power, aided by the deluge of resources he directed toward state-level UMNO leadership.

The swindle's sordidness, however, spawned a second critical contingent factor – Mahathir's return to politics. The impetus of the nonagenarian's intense disgust of Najib's corruption was not without irony, given the string of scandals and persistent abuses of power that punctuated his more than two decades in power.[132] (In 2020, Najib was found guilty of corruption and was sentenced to 12 years in prison; appeals were denied and in 2022, he was imprisoned. In 2024, his sentence was reduced to six years.)

[130] Loh and Saravanamuttu 2003; Weiss 2006, chapters 5 and 6.
[131] Case 2017; Gabriel 2018. [132] Wain 2012, chapter 6.

The brewing megascandal pushed in 2016 Mahathir and Anwar to reconcile publicly, although the former established his own party, PPBM. Some UMNO elites defected and joined, including Muhyiddin Yassin, the Deputy Prime Minister whom Najib had sacked on account of disloyalty during the 1MDB affair. In the 2018 polls, PPBM drew some support from UMNO's core rural constituencies.[133]

The PH coalition's improbable win not only caught pollsters off guard; it took the coalition by surprise. Optimists among them thought a repeat of 2013 was possible, namely, winning the popular vote without securing a parliamentary majority. Few imagined PH would be thrust into a governing position. Consider the authors of the PH's election manifesto. The ambitious platform was replete with bombastic campaign vows predicated on unworkable assumptions.[134] Why fret over the practicality and minutia of policy implementation when UMNO's coalitions had won elections uninterruptedly since the 1950s? PH strove to unveil popular, if not populist, policy positions. Its first pledge sought to abolish the detested and regressive GST.[135] Yet the manifesto avoided reconciling how a PH government would fund an expansion of social spending on affordable housing (promise no. 4) and quality health services (promise no. 9) from a narrower tax revenue base. (It never did resolve this dilemma.)

Promise no.10 guaranteed the people's basic food needs while addressing farmer welfare. The manifesto declared that the "monopoly granted by UMNO and Barisan Nasional to BERNAS will be removed … ."[136] An easy position to take, this vow appealed to rural and urban voters, given Bernas's pervasive unpopularity. But the upstart challenger went further. Playing the role of the prideful production nationalist, it committed to ensuring that "Malaysia … can guarantee self-sufficiency even in times of crisis."[137] The most cursory reading of Malaysia's modern history reveals the near impossibility of achieving sustainable self-sufficiency in rice, let alone during a crisis. The manifesto never addressed the costs associated with maximizing rice output. Revoking Bernas's import monopoly was one thing, but it was doubtful Malaysians were in favor of relying almost exclusively on expensive local rice. The difficulty of being held accountable to outrageous campaign

[133] Hutchinson and Lee 2019, esp. p. 15; Ostwald and Oliver 2020.
[134] A ghost-writer admitted that, "PH was willing to promise anything under the sun, moon, and everything in between." ["Stuck between Ideals and Realities, Pakatan Doomed from the Get-Go: Wan Saiful," thevibes.com, February 28, 2021 (last accessed October 24, 2023)].
[135] Pakatan Harapan 2018, p. 8. [136] Ibid., p. 33. [137] Ibid., p. 32.

promises heralded the governance problems that would dog the PH administration and hasten its swift demise.[138]

The PH government did actualize some campaign promises. It terminated the GST and declared that Bernas's monopoly license would not be renewed when it was set to expire in 2021.[139] The new agriculture minister announced that committees and interministerial teams were studying models from elsewhere that would serve as an alternative to what he referred to as the rice sector's single gatekeeper mechanism.[140]

Reactions of stakeholders followed predictable scripts. Syed Mokhtar stayed silent on the matter; Malay private business associations proposed at least 30 percent of the import quota be reserved for *bumiputera* companies; farmer groups implored that free trade would further impoverish paddy growers; and Bernas's chief executive officer defended his company's performance. He reminded Malaysians that, as the buyer of last resort, Bernas unhesitatingly has been purchasing even diseased paddy for years.[141] Furthermore, under Bernas's watch, its CEO asked rhetorically, did the country ever experience prolonged price spikes or desperately acute shortages? (Comparisons to neighboring Indonesia and the Philippines were implicit.[142]) Finally, he warned of major disruptions to the sector, including supply chains, if Bernas were to be stripped of its supervisory role, including as implementor of its social obligations.

These public statements were seconded by a Bernas manager to me in private. He lamented that Malaysians have a selective and biased view of the company: They see it as a symbol of corrosive cronyism but fail to grasp the entirety of Bernas's functions. They do not witness nor understand the taxing but unpublicized work that Bernas puts into executing its supervisory functions. And perilously, there was no other agency remotely ready to fill its shoes. Securing import deals at reasonable prices, which requires seasoned experience and trusting partnerships with exporters, is not as easy as the "vultures" believe it to be. Lastly, if the PH government were to compel Bernas to continue overseeing its

[138] Weiss (2019) compares PH and BN manifestos.
[139] On reforms enacted, see Dettman (2020).
[140] In early 2020, the ministry's name again was changed, this time to the Agriculture and Food Industries Ministry.
[141] Bernas's statistics on purchases of poor-quality paddy is unverifiable; there is temptation to inflate the figure to draw public sympathy.
[142] "'Pernahkah Beras Tak Cukup?' – CEO Bernas Najib Aroff," astroawani.com, June 12, 2018 (last accessed October 24, 2023).

social obligations, he asked, from where would the money come if not from Bernas's import operations?[143]

The clamor over Bernas's import monopoly proved moot. In a series of complicated and remarkable events, the PH administration, a victim of outsized expectations, fell apart after less than two years in power. On account of street protests and UMNO's surprising success in a number of by-elections, pressure mounted on PH. In addition to a polarizing *bumiputera* rights rhetoric intensified by novel UMNO-PAS collaboration, Mahathir appeared reluctant to follow through on his promise to relinquish power to Anwar after two years in office. As that deadline loomed, some PPBM and PKR politicians conspired to form a new ruling coalition of Malay unity between UMNO and PAS. Mahathir tried to force their hand by resigning from the premiership, yet he was outmaneuvered by his backroom, party-coup-plotting opponents. By the time the dust had settled, his PPBM deputy, Muhyiddin Yassin, with the king's assent, formed a new National Alliance (Perikatan Nasional, PN) coalitional government in early 2020.[144]

Several months after seizing the premiership, and after some 25 years of having served as the chief minister of the state of Johor, where he worked closely with Syed Mokhtar, Muhyiddin reinstated Bernas's import monopoly in late 2020. His PN government then granted Bernas a lucrative 10-year extension to 2031. To what extent the PH's limited reforms – such as filling some government posts with technocrats rather than political appointees – would endure remains to be seen. But it was clear that the government's attempt to jolt the country's rice trade had been eclipsed. Just how valuable the extension proves to be for Syed Mokhtar's Bernas will be difficult to assess. After all, by design, the public lacks the right to scrutinize the private monopoly importer's books. Whether the government will have unvarnished access to Bernas's data, including complete pricing and costs, for policymaking purposes remains an open (and vexing) question.

COVID-19 Fallout and Anwar's Ascension

Unplanned, however, was the extensive roiling of the economy as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the latter a global pandemic. More than two years later, over 35,000 Malaysians may have died from contracting the

[143] Anonymous interview, Bernas manager, Petaling Jaya, February 28, 2019.
[144] Chin 2020; Ufen 2021. The commanding position of the king rotates among Malaysia's nine sultans every five years.

coronavirus. On a per capita basis, the country's death rate at the time was estimated to be the highest in the region by a wide margin.[145]

The pandemic's economic fallout was also devastating. In 2020, the Malaysian economy contracted 5.6 percent, its worst annual performance since the 1997/98 AFC. Unemployment in denser urban areas rose sharply because of unprecedented movement control orders (MCO) intended to slow the virus's contagion. Muhyiddin's PN government in 2020 and 2021 introduced a number of massive stimulus packages, totalling US$91 billion, to stymie the worst of the economic slowdown. While the aid packages cushioned some of the economic downturn's impact, they could not prevent a marked increase in inequality. In 2020, the country's absolute poverty rate rose almost 3 points to 8.4 percent, and about one-fifth of households from the middle 40 percent income group slipped into the bottom 40 percent category.[146] These are government figures. According to a 2020 United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund study conducted during the pandemic, which used its own methodology and thresholds, poverty was measured at over 40 percent among apartment-dwellers in Kuala Lumpur, the country's former capital and one of its wealthiest cities.[147]

Worries over food security understandably grew acute, especially with weakened purchasing power among low-income consumers. Fears of widespread food unavailability, fortunately, did not materialize. International logistics systems proved more resilient than some experts had anticipated, and Bernas was able to import rather regular volumes of rice; estimates report 0.89 million metric tons in 2019, 1.1 million in 2020, and 1.2 million in 2021. Unlike during the 2008 rice crisis, international prices did not spike as surplus countries in the main did not ban exports. Equally important, owing to favorable weather and some government support, Malaysian paddy production remained steady at about 1.8 million metric tons.[148]

The enormity of the aid packages could not, however, stymie the demise of Muhyiddin's premiership. Public dissatisfaction, particularly the vehemence that was expressed online, escalated throughout 2021 over his perceived mishandling of the pandemic and the waning efficacy of the MCOs, as successive waves of infections emerged due to the spread of more contagious subvariants.[149] The country's king, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Shah, had controversially granted Muhyiddin's request to

[145] Johns Hopkins University (at worldometers.info/coronavirus/) was a trusted compiler of such data.
[146] The middle 40 earn monthly RM4580 to RM10,959 (Fatimah 2023). [147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid. [149] Mangiarotti 2021.

proclaim a national state of emergency in early 2021 – the first since the 1969 riots. Yet when the monarch, just as controversially, legitimized anti-Muhyiddin sentiments by reproaching his government, it was doomed to fall. Its slim parliamentary majority only hastened the pace. In August 2021, through back-room dealings, Muhyiddin's defense secretary and UMNO vice-president, Ismail Sabri Yakoob, surprisingly emerged as Malaysia's third prime minister in as many years. The erstwhile agriculture minister tried to distance himself from his racist past by forging unity in government in the face of unremitting multidimensional crises. Parliament signed a memorandum of understanding to such effect, with promises to enact some political reforms aimed at interparty reconciliation. Ismail hardly had time to institutionalize them.[150] Some 25 years after the presumptive successor to Mahathir was beaten in jail, Anwar finally realized his political ambition. As a result of the elections in 2022, the leader of the multiethnic PH coalition assumed the premiership. He became Malaysia's sixth PM since Mahathir's 2003 resignation.

With Anwar at the helm, the country's present political arrangement, coupled with external factors, is impacting Syed Mokhtar's ability to continue to profit from the country's rice import regime. His two biggest political patrons, Mahathir and Muhyiddin, are currently out of power. (The former lost his parliamentary seat in a 2022 shocker, and the latter heads the more Malay nationalist opposition coalition PN.) Syed Mokhtar's vulnerability has emboldened Anwar. Soon after taking office, he putatively "reprimanded" the tycoon for profiting from rising rice prices and for exploiting the industry's multitude of small-scale players. Anwar's antipathy, at least publicly, toward Syed Mokhtar has been longstanding. According to Anwar, the magnate pledged to distribute RM10 million in assistance to farmers in three states in December 2022 and in 2023 another RM50 million to growers elsewhere. The 2022 payment works out to about RM250 per recipient, or roughly ten percent of their on-farm *and* off-farm monthly income. This pales to the RM670 million (approximately US$140.2 million) in dividends for the 2020 financial year that the monopoly importer reportedly paid its (new) parent company, Perspective Lane, wholly owned by Syed Mokhtar. Apparently flush with cash, Bernas also acquired a sugar refinery for RM1.5 billion – from Perspective Lane.[151]

[150] Ostwald 2022.

[151] "Bernas – a Moneymaking Monopoly That Paid RM670 Mil in Dividends in 2020," theedgemalaysia.com, January 18, 2023 (last accessed October 24, 2023). Bernas is no longer obligated to publish an annual report. The press used a 2021 report submitted to the Malaysian Companies Commission to obtain these figures. The report was possibly leaked.

Prevailing headwinds will likely prevent Anwar from revoking Bernas's import permit. Despite some uncertainties, Syed Mokhtar's possession seems to rest on a firm legal basis. A move by Anwar would be challenged in Malaysia's unpredictable courts, where a setback would be a political embarrassment from which Anwar may not recover. His capacity to enact radical reforms has also been compromised by his government's junior partner – UMNO. The 2022 elections had resulted in a hung parliament, and the king granted Anwar permission to form a government. Under political duress, Anwar invited UMNO over PAS and Bersatu; the latter two are allied in the PN and each since has overtaken UMNO as the Malays' party of choice.[152] Anwar thus agreed to hand the Deputy PM position to Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, UMNO's corruption-plagued head. Predictably, Zahid was preoccupied with appointing UMNO lieutenants to cushy board positions in government-linked corporations and with lobbying efforts to have his former boss, Najib, pardoned and released from prison.[153]

Lastly, the recent rise in rice prices has increased the stakes of a potential move against Bernas. In mid-2022, first, they rose in response to supply disruptions and higher oil prices (since most farmers rely on oil-based chemical fertilizers) because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Then, rice prices held steady and even slacked in some months. But starting in mid-2023, they surged behind higher interest rates in the US, which affects rates globally, and then were menaced by a rice export ban imposed by India.[154] Suddenly, shortage fears spread and some panic buying ensued. The price spike was a financial boon for Bernas: It raised its domestic prices by 36 percent ostensibly to reflect higher purchasing and shipping costs. In contrast, the government increased the GMP for farmers only eight percent. (This was its first raise since 2008).[155] Even prior to the most recent rice troubles, Bernas had considerably boosted rice imports (and hence its profits): The average in 2021 and 2022 compared to 2018 and 2019 was 32 percent higher in volume and 43 percent more in value.[156]

For market economists, the solution is painfully obvious – liberalization, accompanied by targeted cash transfer schemes for the

[152] Saleena 2023.
[153] Case 2023; Yeoh 2023. In September 2023, a Malaysian court dismissed dozens of corruption charges against Zahid.
[154] indexmundi.com/commodities/?commodity=rice&months=360&currency=myr (last accessed October 24, 2023).
[155] "Malaysia Grapples with Rice Shortage Amid Global Price Surge," asia.nikkei.com, September 28, 2023 (last accessed October 24, 2023).
[156] Recall that domestic production did not dip appreciably due to the pandemic. "Rice Conundrum Thrusts Food Security into Spotlight," theedgemalaysia.com, September 28, 2023 (last accessed November 11, 2023).

very poor. For a bevy of reasons that this book has surveyed, Anwar remains a reluctant liberalizer. At a point when Mahathir's power has finally waned, that of the production nationalists has waxed. In the latest National Agro-Food Policy (2021-30), which was published by Ismail's short-lived administration, the former agriculture minister set the self-sufficiency target optimistically at 75 percent for 2025 and at 80 percent by 2030.[157] Not only would liberalization render these targets irrelevant, but it should also result in lower farmgate prices, as happened in the Philippines when President Duterte liberalized the trade. Anwar would be politically hard-pressed to take a decision that would *directly* depress the income of rural Malays. (Duterte did not have to consider the ethnic dimension of his reform; Chapter 5). Worse, reform would most likely benefit ethnically Chinese importers. Regardless of Anwar's PKR alliance with the DAP, this is an outcome for which Anwar would loathe to be blamed.

He can sidestep liberalization by transferring Bernas's permit to a different government agency. This step, however, is risky. As Bernas's CEO had correctly pointed out, importing large volumes of rice at appropriate prices is not as simple as sending a telegram, picking up the phone, or text messaging an exporter. It requires experience in learning the trust of dealers and in understanding daily price movements. If an untested agency mishandles purchases and rice prices rise even higher, the snafu could spell the end of Anwar's premiership for which he had so long pined. He may be forced to wait either for rice prices to decline significantly, and thus lessen the political risk, or wait until 2031 when Bernas's license expires. Whether Anwar will be in power then is unknown. But given the rapidity in the turnover of power since his former mentor's first abdication in 2003, the chances are slim.

Conclusion

The Malaysian case surveyed in this chapter demonstrates themes and arguments presented in the Introduction. These include those especially applicable to Part II of this book, from vested interests, production nationalist pride, and nonfunctional rice import regimes to the insights of APE and the power of executive imperatives. Following Green Revolution–related success, Mahathir's government almost immediately faced pressure from the World Bank to reduce public spending on costly paddy production programs and to liberalize the rice sector. As a

[157] Government of Malaysia 2021, p. 4.

powerful prime minister helming a rather robust open economy other sectors, Mahathir had little interest in touting production nationalism, unlike Soeharto and Marcos. Instead, he privatized the country's rice and paddy marketing board, the LPN, in line with his broader privatization program. By manipulating the privatization process, Mahathir ensured the publicly listed Bernas would be a key cog in UMNO's patronage networks. A controlled privatization not only entailed accumulating capital in trustworthy UMNO hands, but it also ensured the government could mandate Bernas to continue implementing LPN's service obligations in the name of protecting (impoverished) Malay paddy farmers, a critical voting bloc for UMNO given its widespread practice of electoral engineering. In short, privatization of the production nationalist LPN put Malaysia's rice import regime on firm nonfunctional footing, divorcing it from strictly filling the production-consumption gap. Despite Bernas's efforts to expand its business profile, the company remained dependent on rice imports for most of its revenue, thereby blurring the line between bolstering food security and boosting company profits.

Production nationalists seized Mahathir's (first) resignation from the premiership in 2003 as an opportunity to restore their confidence and influence; their pride had been bruised by Mahathir's general disinterest in the sector. Plans were accordingly devised to raise rice self-sufficiency rates, even if beyond realistic targets. While the 2008 rice crisis legitimized some of their claims, UMNO's trademark of cultivating wealthy *bumiputera* capitalists proved stiff competition. The takeover of Bernas by Syed Mokhtar threatened the rejuvenation of production nationalism. As stressed in the Introduction, neither camp pined for liberalization. Their interests instead diverged over what constituted an appropriate level of rice self-sufficiency. But Syed Mokhtar's lucrative scheme, with his control of nearly seventy of the country's rice supply, soon experienced its own existential challenge – an electoral-upstart-turned-surprising production nationalist nearly revoked Syed Mokhtar's prized rice import monopoly permit. Seeking to capitalize on public distaste for entrenched UMNO cronyism, the opposition PH vowed to reform rice import policy. While it carried the mantle of production nationalism by championing full rice self-sufficiency, the coalition never promised liberalization, and its government was toppled before its preferred import policy was announced. Despite fragmentation of the country's party system, of which the PH's short-lived government was only one manifestation, succeeding governments in power, including that of Anwar Ibrahim, have continued to subsidize the paddy sector heavily for political purposes. This bedrock feature of Malaysia's rice policies has not changed, nor has the better part of the country's protectionist rice policy model.

4 Indonesia
Persistence Personified

You can't eat money. *(Tak bisa makan uang.)*
Members of Indonesia's Food Security Council, May 2016

From the privatization of the LPN to Anwar Ibrahim's long-awaited premiership, Chapter 3 surveyed the swaying political and financial fortunes of Malaysia's privatized rice agency. Fortunes of Bernas's Indonesian counterpart, Bulog, also shifted over a similar period. But its swings were less wide because Bulog remained under firmer government control, and because Indonesia's electoral politics, following the messy early days of democratization, surprisingly has proved more stable than that of intra-elite relations in Malaysia. Chapter 4 attests that Bulog only weathered the post-Green Revolution period, even with widespread accusations of corruption and incompetence, owing to President Soeharto's unflagging personal attachment to the agency through which he proudly equated rice provision with stability and development. Subsequently, Bulog withstood economic crisis and the country's trying transition to democracy in the late 1990s because of another powerholder, this time the IMF. Dismantling Bulog was part of its broad liberalization program, but the IMF later balked to prevent further societal disorder. It did push through with rice import liberalization, however.

Despite Indonesia's historic transition from authoritarianism, one continuity in particular has hounded Bulog in the post-Soeharto state – exploitation by the politically powerful. As Chapter 4 discusses, the country's political parties emerged as major powerholders in democratic Indonesia, and competitive elections have been widely accepted as the primary mechanism through which to access power and ample state resources. To fund campaigns and other activities, a cartel of parties seized the economic rents occasioned from rice imports once enjoyed by Bulog and Soeharto's loyalists, as well as his family. Not only did rent-seeking become more diffuse, but party elites also rolled back the IMF's rice import liberalization program. Since then, a series of presidents have used rice imports, helmed by Bulog, for various political purposes,

shedding light on the multiple ways this nonfunctionalist rice import regime operates. By paying the varying size and timing of rice imports close heed, this chapter observes that the corresponding revenue generated has been used to fortify coalitional partners of presidents. Yet presidents also have banned rice imports, or artificially suppressed their quantities, for electoral purposes to showcase their nationalist credentials as defenders of the country's noble paddy-producing class. Presidents, although on fewer occasions, have also stepped up imports to lower domestic prices as elections near, an approach that recalls pre-Green Revolution Philippines from the 1960s (Chapter 1). In other instances, presidents have deployed rice politics as a means to punish political rivals. Facilitating these oscillations has been the continuation of vibrant agrarian nationalist sentiments against liberalization in general. Fused with lasting pride in the country's Green Revolution success, production nationalism has been used, with some irony, by powerholders to shape the rice import regime for party and electoral ends, given the institutional constraints of Indonesia's competitive political landscape. These ends, or restraints, have been both less nakedly personal, as in the case of the Philippines (Chapter 5), and less starkly ethnic in orientation, unlike in Malaysia (Chapter 3).

This chapter begins with a discussion of the problems Bulog encountered in the late 1980s on account of the Green Revolution–led production spikes and ends with showcasing massive rice imports under President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo in 2023/24 amid bountiful rice harvests.

Immediate Post-Green Revolution Predicaments

Despite the fanfare surrounding the surges in paddy growth of the early 1980s, questions were raised about the Green Revolution's distributional consequences, especially on Java. By the mid-1970s, rural income growth had either stalled or was falling. In addition to sputtering paddy harvests and damaging pest outbreaks affecting large and small cultivators alike, the labor-displacing effects of institutional changes in Java's harvesting system hit low-income households hard.[1]

For rural incomes, the late 1970s and early 1980s marked a turning point. As we saw in the case of Malaysia (Chapter 3), the Indonesian government's pro-poor, pro-rural spending on subsidization of inorganic fertilizers, on favorable paddy procurement prices, and on investment in irrigation and road building prompted sizable growth in yields and raised

[1] Collier, Wiradi, and Soentoros 1973; Timmer 1973; Kuntjoro-Jakti 1981, chapter 3.

farming income across landholding categories.[2] But two questions remained: Were people living better? And were some benefiting more than others?

Observers answered affirmatively to both questions, but the latter attracted a fair amount of attention. Local elites and richer planters captured state resources, notably subsidized credit, and took advantage of New Order repression to exploit labor by pushing wages down.[3] These same groups gained from a dynamic process of capital accumulation. Cultivators with surplus resources acquired more land or purchased productivity-enhancing machinery; consequently, they invested in such nonfarm activities as local transport and trade, spurring some rural inequality.[4]

This diversification of income generation among wealthier farmers is what led other scholars to suggest that the Green Revolution had likely resulted in a relatively equitable rise in absolute income on Java. Rising on-farm income, Manning maintained, facilitated growth in the informal and formal service sectors.[5] As similarly occurred in Malaysia, the 1970s state promotion of labor-intensive, export-oriented manufacturing created synergistic linkages with a more prosperous countryside. Consider the boom in rural housing; it required a hefty increase in the supply of domestically produced cement and labor to construct those houses. Meanwhile, with an increase in the quantity of available and reasonably priced rice that was a chief wage good, manufacturers hired more workers. Smallholders, tenant farmers, and laborers migrated to cities and larger towns seasonally, others permanently. This migration pushed agricultural wages up, as labor grew scarce.[6] While Manning stressed the interactive growth effect among off-farm and on-farm employment, wages, and investment, he acknowledged that some areas on Java prospered more than others. He thereby tempered his conclusion on the positive distributional impact of the Green Revolution.[7]

Other agricultural economists were more emphatic about the overall rise in incomes. Booth described the Green Revolution on Java as an efficient use of national resources: It depressed disparities in wealth between the urban and rural sectors and among rural classes.[8] Timmer highlighted the decisive role productivity increases in food-crop agriculture had in structurally transforming Indonesia's agrarian-based economy to being predicated evermore on manufacturing and industrialization.[9]

[2] Hill 2000, p. 197; Henley 2015, pp. 86–95. [3] Hart 1986, esp. chapter 7.
[4] Pincus 1996; on transport, see Dick (1981). [5] Manning 1988, pp. 61–78.
[6] Cheetham and Peters 1993, p. 17, table 4. [7] Manning 1988, pp. 59–72.
[8] Booth 2012. [9] Timmer 2005, esp. pp. 19–23.

Total labor in agriculture fell from about 73 percent in 1961 to roughly 50 percent by 1990. Agriculture's share in GDP, another main gauge, dipped even further – by 30 percentage points to 25 percent between 1960 and 1988.[10]

These socioeconomic changes presented policymakers with dilemmas. If 1984 could be described as the year of self-sufficiency, Bulog pondered, then 1985 should be dubbed the "year of the problems of this success."[11] Take the over-production of high-cost rice. Indonesia spent between US$50 million and US$100 million on subsidizing exportable rice from 1985 to 1987, causing the Thai government to express its concern over Indonesia's sudden exporter status.[12]

After years of a profligate pursuit of self-sufficiency and despite the national pride arising from the achievement, the Finance Ministry, not unlike the Thai government, fretted over expenditures associated with rice exports.[13] For its part, the production nationalist Agriculture Ministry feared pumping the brakes on cultivation too hard.[14] It insisted that with a rise in real per capita private expenditure consumption, with a shift to a more rice-based diet, especially in eastern Indonesia, and with population growth in general, a higher number of Indonesians were consuming more quantities of rice than ever before.[15] The ministries reached a compromise: They sought to cut the annual growth rate of paddy output in half to about 2.5 percent.[16]

To do so, the government retained the floor price of paddy at the previous year's level. At the prodding of the World Bank, it also wound down its cheap fertilizer policy. Between 1983 and 1987, the government spent nearly on average Rp. 684 billion (approximately US$402 million) on these subsidies *per year*.[17] The smuggling of fertilizers out of the country, or unauthorized diversion to estate plantations, aggravated the policy's inefficiencies.[18] Ultimately, the large dips in oil prices, first in 1982 and more dramatically in 1986, that resulted in steep drops in public revenues forced the government's hand. (The state controlled

[10] Booth 1992, p. 2, table 1.1; Hill 2000, p. 23, table 2.2.
[11] Bulog 1986a, p. 11.
[12] "Surplus pun Bingung," *Tempo*, October 5, 1985, p. 65; Pearson, Monke, and Baluch 1997, p. 358, table 2; Latham 2024, pp. 93–94.
[13] "Kisah Petani Padi," *Tempo*, November 16, 1985, p. 26.
[14] "Swasembada, Ya; Impor, Tidak," *Tempo*, June 18, 1988, p. 92.
[15] "Angka Sekitar Beras," *Tempo*, June 4, 1988, p. 93; Suryana and Swatika 1997, pp. 189–90, table 1; World Bank 1992, pp. 15, 21, tables 2.1 and 2.4.
[16] Sawit and Manwan 1991.
[17] "A Harvest of Blame," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 21, 1985, pp. 119–21; Bulog 1986a, p. 13; Tabor 1992, pp. 181–83, esp. table 6.11; World Bank 1992, p. xiv; Arifin 1994, p. 34.
[18] "Menuai Selisih Harga," *Gatra*, March 8, 1997, pp. 76–77; Tabor 1999.

the oil sector.) From its peak in 1985/86, the fertilizer subsidy was reduced by over 200 percent by 1990/91 (in *rupiah* terms).[19] If this precipitous yet phased decline marked the material end of Indonesia's Green Revolution, as it did similarly in Malaysia, Soeharto's 1991 acknowledgement that he would accept rice self-sufficiency "on-trend" marked its symbolic end. "On-trend" meant that in unpropitious years imports would be permissible if offset by fulfilling rice targets in favorable years.[20]

Policy changes raised questions concerning the government's commitment to a nearly insolvent Bulog. Its warehouses overflowed with excess, and therefore unsellable, rice, and with fewer rice imports, a key revenue (and rent-seeking) source had dried up. Bulog struggled to make the monthly repayments on its massive loans for rice procurement to its state bank creditors, even at subsidized interest rates. Pleading for a capital injection, its leadership argued that the government should help shoulder the cost of the agency's success (pointing to Japan as an example to support its case). The government agreed and allotted Rp. 417.4 billion (approximately US$245 million) in its 1986/87 budget. Yet the payment was canceled when in 1986 oil prices crashed.[21]

While there were discussions of phasing out the specialized rice distribution program and privatizing a sizable portion of Bulog's Rp. 3 trillion assets, especially most of its 1400 warehouses, Soeharto, the production nationalist, unlike Mahathir, was uninterested in either.[22] What rescued Bulog, financially speaking, in the end was luck, or bad luck, depending on one's views of the parastatal.

Bulog's Fortunate Fate

Because drought returned to Indonesia with semiregularity in the late 1980s and continued into the succeeding decade, rice production grew increasingly erratic. Dips during dry years (1987/88, 1991/92, and 1993/94) led to the importation of hundreds of thousands of tons of rice to stabilize domestic prices. These sizable imports caused less macroeconomic damage than in the past, however, since the economy was now larger and more diversified.[23] Bulog officials still welcomed their revival. With a major revenue (and rent) source back on-stream, the State

[19] World Bank 1992, p. 64, table 4.5. [20] Manning 1992, p. 25.
[21] Bulog 1986a, p. 14; "Bukan Dilema Beras, Cuma Risiko," *Tempo*, January 18, 1986, p. 75; Arifin 1994, pp. 328.
[22] World Bank 1992, pp. xv, xvii, 92; Arifin 1994, p. 347.
[23] Manning 1992, esp. pp. 22–24.

Auditing Board gave Bulog a clean bill of financial health in 1992. It was a remarkable reversal from near bankruptcy some six years earlier.[24]

Bustanil Arifin, the head of Bulog since 1973, also experienced a sharp reversal in fortune, although in adverse direction. The former general was part of Soeharto's inner circle. He served on the board of directors, along with other cronies and members of the president's family, of several massive charitable foundations (*yayasan*) that Soeharto had established.[25] But, in 1993, Arifin was surprisingly left off the new cabinet roster, which meant he was also relieved of his duties at Bulog. Reports surfaced of Arifin's unease over Liem Sioe Liong's intention to list on Jakarta's flourishing stock market some of his Salim Group's assets, including that of Indofood, which was now the parent company of the enormous Bogasari Flour Mills. The possible public disclosure of some of these companies' financial dealings, including those with Bulog, explained Arifin's anxiousness.[26]

Ibrahim Hasan, Bulog's deputy head, replaced his boss. Hasan was not long for the job, however. Despite or because of drought in 1993/94, he inexplicably allowed Bulog's stocks to drop to a dangerously low level of 200,000 metric tons. Each year, Bulog, after all, was still responsible for supplying about 1.6 million metric tons of (subsidized) rice to the armed forces and civil service, in addition to interjecting supplies into the market to stabilize prices. On account of Hasan's mismanagement, prices rose. Hasan had to rely on the help of Arifin and Liem's eldest son, Anthony Salim, to source much-needed imports from Thailand.[27] An angered Soeharto was quoted to have remarked, "It is high time we rethink how we administer our food strategy that all this while we assumed was reasonably safe."[28]

The rethink cost Hasan his job at Bulog and his cabinet post as state minister of food affairs. (Soeharto rarely fired ministers.) In 1995, Hasan's own deputy, Beddu Amang, replaced him atop Bulog and in the cabinet. The rethink also cost Bulog its status as an autonomous government department. It was placed under the watchful eye of the Trade and Industry Ministry.

The institutional restructuring fueled speculation that Bulog was ripe for reform. A chief buzzword in Indonesia at the time was "liberalization." Interpretations of how entrenched interests stymied

[24] "Prestasi WTS Setelah 25 Tahun," *Tempo*, May 9, 1992, pp. 88–90; Tirtosudiro 1997, pp. 19–20.
[25] Robison and Hadiz 2004, p. 57. [26] Schwarz 1999, pp. 114–15.
[27] "Reshuffle Likely at Commodities Agency After Fall in Indonesian Rice Stocks," *Business Times* (Singapore), February 11, 1995.
[28] "Setelah Ditinggal Bustanil," *Gatra*, February 25, 1995, p. 33.

reform efforts, explaining the ad hoc, haphazard way in which liberalization unfolded in the 1980s and 1990s, have become a cottage industry.[29] A faction of technocrats in Soeharto's governments, as well as World Bank and IMF officials, had long pressed for freeing up the country's economy. But the oil-driven growth of the 1970s – real GDP grew at a robust rate of 7.7 percent annually for the decade[30] – had provided the grist for economic nationalist, state-sector enthusiasts to keep deregulation at bay. But the protectionists' dam began to crack with the collapse in oil prices and ensuing economic slowdown. As government revenues shrank and external indebtedness swelled, Soeharto was compelled to shift policy toward a more market-friendly, export-oriented strategy with increased private sector investment and participation throughout the 1980s and the following decade. Structural adjustments led to a surge in nonoil exports from $5 billion in 1983 to $14.4 billion by 1990, more than doubling their share in total exports to 56 percent.[31]

At Bulog and in the agricultural sector generally, unlike in Malaysia, continuity prevailed amid this sea of change. Soeharto proudly clung to his FAO award and his successful food-crop interventionist policies. By 1990, the latter had helped to lift more than 26 million rural Indonesians out of poverty, leading some observers to cite it among the most impressive anti-poverty campaigns of the second half of the twentieth century.[32]

But technocrats, emboldened by successes in other sectors and by a Soeharto-initiated period of political openness, and World Bank officials took aim at the agricultural sector. They singled out Bulog's monopolies as a prime cause of the country's high-cost economy.[33] In 1992, Soeharto permitted the privatization of unprofitable state plantations.[34]

Making strange bedfellows, market liberals and parliamentarians put Bulog's wheat monopoly under scrutiny. Politicians were more bent on squeezing Chinese capital than motivated by deregulation as a matter of economic principle. The collusive arrangement where Bulog sold its imported wheat (and wheat flour) to Bogasari, which sold the processed product back to Bulog, generated hundreds of millions of dollars in windfall profits each year.[35] In 1995, after Amang was called before a

[29] For a useful overview, see Rosser (2002, chapter 3). [30] Hill 2000, p. 16.
[31] Aziz 1994. [32] World Bank 1992, pp. ix, 5; Hill 2000, p. 198, table 10.2.
[33] "Bulog di Mata Bank Dunia," *Tempo*, June 25, 1994, p. 88. Successful intervention in rice had provided the confidence to intervene in the economy broadly (Rock 1999).
[34] "Suharto Backs Privatisation of Ailing Plantation Companies," *Business Times* (Singapore), August 5, 1992.
[35] "Jurus Mengatrol Efisiensi," *Gatra*, November 15, 1997, 37–38; Schwarz 1999, pp. 110–11.

parliamentary committee on multiple occasions to testify about Bulog's monopolies, Soeharto ordered attacks on the agency to cease.[36]

The absence of the rice sector from these parliamentary discussions or in the press was striking. Internationally, the pressure to liberalize waned when the Uruguay Round negotiations over the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and later the WTO, freed Indonesia from having import quotas and other declining tariff schedules imposed on it. Not only was rice designated a sensitive commodity, but also Indonesia was deemed a "fair" market player due to the size of its past rice imports.[37]

Domestically, wheat was safer to attack than rice. Reformers manifestly understood the difference. In a 1992 commentary published in the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, a US-trained Indonesian economist, Mari Pangestu, promoted the deregulation of food – save for rice.[38] The coordinating minister of the economy, Salef Afiff, described Bulog's monopolies accordingly: "If I have the full authority, I will slash them all, except for rice … which I will not touch at all."[39] These sentiments were informed by Soeharto's preferences. Notably, in 1992, with pride the president presided over Bulog's silver anniversary celebrations.[40] Upon his leaving his post, Hasan, in a frank interview, stated that "Bulog will be put under the spotlight, everyone hates it. If it survives, it is all because of the President … Bulog is his little shop (*warungnya*)."[41]

Unlike the LPN in Malaysia, Bulog did more than survive – it thrived, in the meantime. It remained embedded in the expansive network of companies and foundations that delivered rents and other patronage-based perks to the president, his family members, cronies, military personnel, politicians, and other loyalists.[42] Moreover, Bulog benefited from the return to the elevated rice import volumes – 1.8 million tons in 1995 and 1.62 million tons in 1996. Paddy production was lagging because of the cuts in the fertilizer subsidy and land conversion out of agriculture.[43] Then, in 1996/97, drought conditions arising from the country's worst El-Niño Southern Oscillation episode in decades compounded difficulties. Soeharto's adult children seized the opportunity to

[36] Borsuk and Chng 2014, pp. 311–15.
[37] "Nasib Beras dan Gula," *Gatra*, September 21, 1996, p. 75.
[38] Mari Pangestu, "An Economic Agenda for Indonesia," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, June 16, 1992 (cited in Borsuk and Chng 2014, p. 304).
[39] "Salim Moves into Basics: Water and Rice," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, February 28, 1996; "Plan to Dismantle Bulog's Monopoly in Key Commodities," *Business Times* (Singapore), August 22, 1997.
[40] His speech is reprinted in Arifin 1994, pp. 365–70.
[41] "Bulog Itu Disorot," *Gatra*, February 25, 1995, p. 34.
[42] Aditjondro ca. 1998–99; Dijk 2001, p. 75. [43] Tabor 1999.

gain a share of the lucrative rice import business. It was reported that one Soeharto daughter was given a US$90 million cut, and another received one half as large, from a 1997–98 import contract Liem held with Bulog for two million tons of rice valued at over US$650 million.[44]

Rather than liberalize the rice trade as a cost-effective means of closing the growing production-consumption gap, a move which even Mahathir sidestepped, Soeharto's government devised a different plan to lift domestic production capacity. Starting in 1996, engineers began converting one million hectares of swampy peatlands in the southern reaches of the province of Central Kalimantan into wet-rice fields at a cost of US $2 to 3 billion.[45] By August 1997, exacerbated by strong, dry El Niño winds, fires that were set intentionally for land clearance burned out of control. The stored carbon in the peat moss that was released by the burning developed into a noxious smog. The smoke lasted for weeks, blanketed some 15 million square kilometers across Southeast Asia, and caused billions of dollars in economic losses. In 1998, the megaproject that was designed to overcome the country's rice deficiency was mercifully abandoned.

In the same year, President Soeharto too was abandoned. With the economy in freefall as a result of the AFC – at one point the Indonesian *rupiah* plummeted about 90 percent in value – with deadly riots in Jakarta targeting the ethnic Chinese minority, and with thousands of students occupying the grounds of Parliament, cabinet members began to resign; meanwhile, parliamentary allies withdrew their support for the octogenarian dictator. So too did the US and the bulk of the armed forces' leadership. By May, Soeharto was forced to transfer the powers of the presidency to his hand-picked civilian vice-president, B. J. Habibie. Soeharto's curt, nationally televised resignation speech thrust the country on an arduous journey toward parliamentary democracy.

In exchange for billions of dollars in bailout loans in late 1997, Indonesia's cash-strapped government had already agreed to strict IMF conditionality measures. Rounds of renegotiations had gone on for months amid resistance by Soeharto at implementing the reforms demanded by the IMF. Using the crisis as a pretext to further pry open Indonesia's economy, it wanted to eliminate monopolies, subsidies, tariffs, and other cronyistic practices that it believed blocked the deeper integration of the domestic economy with world trade and foreign investment.[46]

[44] "Salim-Cendana Ikut Impor," *Gatra*, July 18, 1998, p. 61; "The Family Firm," *Time* (Asia) 1999.
[45] "Swamp for Sale," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 7, 1995, pp. 58–59.
[46] Robison and Hadiz 2004, pp.156, 201.

Bulog was a popular monopoly-busting target, for economic *and* symbolic reasons. Starting in early 1998, it began to lose its monopolies, but Soeharto and Amang insisted that it keep its authority over rice.[47] As the crisis worsened and rice prices climbed steeply, and with Soeharto now out of power, Bulog's rice import monopoly was lifted in September. The agency, however, was not dismantled, for the IMF believed its domestic operations remained a bulwark against further deterioration of the social order.[48] The IMF Asia Pacific head was quoted as saying: "Rice influences inflation, which influences the exchange rate and the welfare of the population. Rice is an important item; therefore, along with other institutions, the IMF cannot ignore the rice issue. It is central."[49]

Without a regulatory framework in place except for open tenders, Bulog and private sector importers in 1998 flooded the market with 7.1 million tons of tariff-free imported rice, and an additional 5.0 million tons a year later.[50] These figures, however, may have underestimated the amount of foreign rice entering the country. Smuggling was rampant given the wild price swings of Indonesia's currency, and the undervoicing or underreporting of official imports was hastened by the softening of law and order under crisis conditions.[51]

Short-Lived Presidencies

In 1998, during the height of the AFC, private firms aided in bringing in prodigious amounts of tariff-free foreign rice to alleviate widespread shortages. The shortages were caused by an El Niño-induced dip in production and by hoarding among speculators and households as the value of the *rupiah* plunged.[52] The arrival of imports eased shortages, and prices fell, lending credence to longstanding arguments of market

[47] "Ahkirnya Ada Kesepakatan," *Gatra*, November 8, 1997, p. 34; "Monopoly of Virtue," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 30, 1998, pp. 48–49.

[48] "IMF Approves Subsidies and Bulog's Existence," *Jakarta Post*, March 21, 1998; Rosser 2002, p. 180.

[49] "Jakarta to Act Fast on Widening Rice Scheme," *Business Times* (Singapore), September 12, 1998.

[50] The split between Bulog and private sector imports for 1998 was 82 and 18 percent, for 1999 it was 38 and 62 percent (Amang and Sawit 2002, p. 368, table IV.A.5.2). Conflicting data concerning these imports is discussed below.

[51] "Tender Beras Impor," *Gatra*, August 29, 1998, p. 60; "Lubang Ditutup: Penggerogot Beras Dijerat," *Gatra*, September 19, 1998, pp. 25–27; Surono 2001, pp. 44–45, tables 3.4 and 3.5.

[52] Paddy production declined by 3.4 percent in 1998 and 0.3 percent in 1999 (Sawit and Lokollo 2007, p. 65). The *rupiah* shed about 90 percent of its value at one point, and lootings of Chinese Indonesian warehouses was widespread (Purdey 2006, chapter 3).

liberals.[53] Nonetheless, not all welcomed these developments. Production nationalists who took enormous pride in minimizing rice imports under the New Order as validation of their work took umbrage with the import deluge of 1998 *and* 1999. These veteran policymakers saw it as a national embarrassment, as it earned Indonesia the title of the world's largest rice importer. They partially blamed this dubious distinction on President Habibie, an aeronautical engineer with no knowledge of the rice sector. They also worried about the deleterious impact on domestic output and on the income of millions of paddy growers, if heightened import reliance were normalized.[54]

In the meantime, Bulog's domestic capacities were put to the test. Despite justified misgivings, the government appointed the agency to spearhead a social assistance program, known as Special Market Operation (Operasi Pasar Khusus, OPK). With its nationwide network of offices and warehouses, Bulog was deemed the most prepared body to execute plans to distribute 15 kilograms of low-cost rice per month to about 11 million qualified households through 40,000 distribution points.[55]

The circulation of about two million metric tons at roughly 60 percent below market price over a vast area proved too tempting for Bulog officials and members of the Association of Rice and Rice Milling Entrepreneurs of Indonesia (Perpadi).[56] Collusive arrangements resulted in anywhere between a quarter and a half of the targeted supply to disappear.[57] Similar to what happened to Malaysia's subsidized rice program (Chapter 3), some traders mixed the subsidized supply with regular rice for sale on the open market. Implicated Bulog officials were fired, and several traders at Jakarta's main rice market (Cipinang) were arrested.[58]

Bulog was sourcing a large portion of this immense supply needed for the OPK program from imports. IMF agreements had not barred it from importing, only from receiving preferential treatment, including low-interest rate loans from state banks and subsidized foreign exchange rates.[59] Bulog held open tenders during 1998 and 1999, through which

[53] Tabor 1999.
[54] Amang and Sawit 2002; Djanuwardi 2002; Sawit and Lokollo 2007; Interview, Tahlim Sudaryanto, former executive secretary, Directorate General of Food Crop Production, Agriculture Ministry, Bogor, May 18, 2016. Indonesia's self-sufficiency level reached its nadir at about 89 percent in 1998/99. See also Fane and Warr (2008).
[55] World Bank 2012, p. 14, table 2; see also Tabor (1999).
[56] In Indonesian, the acronym is from Persatuan Pengusaha Penggilingan Padi dan Beras Indonesia.
[57] Olken 2006; World Bank 2012.
[58] "Lubang Ditutup, Penggerogot Beras Dijerat," *Gatra*, September 19, 1998, pp. 25–27.
[59] These prohibitions (under IMF guidance) were written into the then new Central Bank Law (No. 23 of 1999).

it purchased foreign rice from auction winners.[60] These auctions helped to forge a fresh coalition of rent-seekers between Bulog officials and the new power holders in post-Soeharto Indonesia, that is, political party elites.

To forestall a return to authoritarianism, the country's governing elites sought to institute multiparty competitive elections and empower Parliament. Amid these democratic reforms, a cartel of the larger parties formed to control the scope and pace of the transition. Plum cabinet jobs, parliamentary positions, and other key posts with regular access to rents were divided among grand, rainbow-style coalitional partners. Oppositional party politics – a basic tenet of parliamentary democracy – hardly existed.[61]

Party elites seized upon Bulog to secure sizable funds for personal and especially electoral purposes. Akbar Tanjung, chairman of the Golkar political party and parliamentary speaker, was accused of misappropriating Rp. 40 billion (about US$4.2 million) from a Bulog charity fund in the lead-up to the 1999 democratic elections.[62] (Golkar had been the New Order's electoral vehicle and pivotal distributor of rents; controversially, it weathered the transition to democracy.) Party elites also endeavored to muscle in on the rents from imports lost during the transition by New Order cronies, including Chinese tycoons, most prominently Liem and Soeharto's family members.[63]

Pining for new Bulog leadership with less allegiance to the old regime, party elites pressed President Habibie to force Beddu Amang from Bulog. Head of Bulog since 1995, he was protective of New Order interests. (In 2001, he was found guilty of brokering a crooked land deal on behalf of Soeharto's son, Tommy.[64]) In August 1998, Habibie replaced Amang with close confidant and trade and industry minister, Rahardi Ramelan. Predicated on IMF agreements, Ramelan oversaw the first open tender for rice imports whose outcomes seemingly fit the multilateral organization's expectations. The transparent bidding process resulted in foreign firms winning six of the eight contracts.[65]

Accusations mounted of unfair dealings in succeeding auctions. For a late 1998 exercise with quotas about four times the average size of earlier

[60] Bulog may have controlled three-quarters of rice imports then (Leith, Porter, and Warr 2003, esp. p. 10).
[61] Slater 2004; Ambardi 2009.
[62] The Supreme Court in 2004 overturned two guilty verdicts. Tomsa stresses that these scandals involved misappropriating money for party purposes (2008, pp. 85-86).
[63] Robison and Hadiz, 2004, chapter 8; Borsuk and Chng 2014, chapters 17–20.
[64] O'Rourke 2002, pp. 230-34.
[65] "Tender Beras Bulog," *Gatra*, September 26,1998, p. 40.

tenders, Indonesian firms won five of the seven bids. One company was affiliated with Golkar and two with relatives of retired generals.[66] Foreign traders complained that Bulog was disregarding its own rules by allowing winners to purchase old stocks from foreign exporters, which explained their low bids.[67] Bulog was incentivized to purchase its foreign stocks as cheaply as possible, as the low-quality grain was destined to be consumed by the country's poor via the OPK program, or to be bagged illegally with medium-quality rice to be sold by traders on the open market. With sizeable rents available from either option, it surprised few when party leaders joined Bulog to lobby for the subsidized rice scheme's extension. (The OPK program was intended to be a temporary social safety net measure to mitigate the impact of the economic crisis.) In 2001, OPK was renamed Raskin (derived from *Beras untuk Orang Miskin*, or Rice for the Poor) and became a regular program.[68] So too were the rents for Bulog and other new regime insiders, from top politicians to favored rice traders.

Bureaucrats sought out empowered party elites as partners amid the reconfiguration of political power and rent-capture. Some fretted over job security because of the restructuring of ministries during the transition. Others saw the uncertainty as a chance to advance their careers by demonstrating their usefulness to party leaders. Job insecurity and opportunism fused in the case of Sapuan, a high-ranking official in the Food Affairs Department in the powerful State Secretariat. Bureaucratic reorganization led Habibie's successor, President Abdurrahman Wahid, better known as Gus Dur, to abolish Sapuan's department. Sapuan thus petitioned Gus Dur directly, and in late 1999, he secured the desirable position of Bulog deputy head. There, he served as a rent-fixer for connected politicians. By then, a constellation of public agencies and private firms had come to dominate the rice import business. Nurdin Halid from Golkar, who helmed the National Federation of Village Cooperatives, Setya Novanto of Golkar, and Widjanarko Puspoyo of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) numbered among

[66] Active in the pro-*pribumi* Young Indonesian Business Association (HIMPI), Andi Achmad Dara, director of Andiradasana Interdwipa, would represent Golkar in Parliament (2014–19). Director Commissioner of Pratiwi Putri Sulung was the son of Ret. Gen. Tri Soetrisno and vice-president (1993–98); and director of Armanajaya Perkasa Nusa was the wife of Ret. Gen. Wigoyo Atmodarminto, governor of Jakarta (1987–92). For company names, see "Impor Beras Tender Lagi," *Tempo*, December 28, 1998, p. 83.

[67] "Local Company Wins Tender to Import 75,000 Tons of Rice," *The Jakarta Post*, August 13, 1999.

[68] Presidential Instruction no. 9 of 2001.

key parliamentary actors.[69] They were behind certain companies where kickbacks to Bulog officials like Sapuan were routine.[70]

While rent-seeking continued apace, so did handwringing about reforming Bulog. Despite its waning influence on liberalizing the Indonesian economy, the IMF persisted in its desire to transform Bulog into a more commercial entity that would resemble Bernas in some respects. Not only would profit-orientation lessen the burden on state finances, the IMF believed, but it also might provide the agency with the autonomy to fend off assaults on its resources by the powerful. The IMF leveraged the results of a damaging audit by the American accounting firm Arthur Andersen, released in 2000, to justify its case. The controversial audit concluded that from 1993 to early 1998 state losses arising from inefficiencies and other irregularities at Bulog totaled around US$800 million.[71]

But protectionist policymakers, having grown weary of the IMF's deregulation programs, brandished the surge of rice imports as evidence that liberalization had gone awry. In 2000, Gus Dur's Trade and Industry Ministry, despite IMF resistance, slapped a Rp. 430 tariff on each kilogram of imported rice (then equivalent to a 21 percent ad valorem tariff rate[72]). Knowing the suppressive effect the tariff would have on import volumes, Bulog leadership in private unsuccessfully lobbied against the policy change. (Publicly, they toed the government's line.[73]) In 2000, imports shrank to less than three times the volume of the year prior; in 2001 they fell *another* three times in size.[74] The totals likely dipped below even Bulog's pessimistic prognostications, for the agency could not have predicted that favorable weather would return in 2000 and 2001 and galvanize national paddy cultivation.[75] A year after the tariff's introduction, Gus Dur implemented another protectionist pro-farmer policy: He raised the official floor price – or Bulog's

[69] Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan.

[70] There were over 100 firms under about 8 umbrella companies (Riawanti 2015, chapter 6).

[71] "10.3t Rupiah in Govt Funds Misused: Indon Watchdog," *The Business Times* (Singapore), September 27, 2001. See also Arifin (2008, p. 146, table 6.3).

[72] Leith, Porter, and Warr 2003. This tariff was within the range allowed by WTO rules, despite IMF grumbling (Sawit and Lokollo 2007, p. 68).

[73] Riawanti 2015, chapter 5.

[74] According to BPS, Indonesia imported 4.7 million metric tons in 1999, 1.3 million in 2000, and 0.3 million in 2001 (BPS 2002, p. 352, table 7.3.11).

[75] According to BPS, Indonesia produced 50.9 million metric tons of paddy in 1999, 51.9 million in 2000, and 51.4 million in 2001 (BPS 2002, p. 145, figure 5.2); USDA 2002, p. 4.

procurement price – of paddy by 50 percent to Rp. 1500 per kilogram.[76] It was the first such raise since 1998.

Intensified squabbling among Gus Dur's coalition members dragged Bulog into the fray of party politics, corruption, and unwanted public scrutiny. PDI-P and Golkar, the two largest parties in Parliament, sought to strike back at the president for firing party members from his cabinet. Among them was Jusuf Kalla, the trade and industry minister, who, like Ramelan before him, concurrently headed Bulog. Gus Dur dismissed Kalla for corruption allegations, some of which were linked to rice imports.[77] An important piece of evidence in Gus Dur's eventual impeachment also implicated Bulog. In a scandal dubbed Buloggate I, the aforementioned Sapuan was accused of channeling Rp. 35 billion (about US$5 million) in funds from a Bulog employee welfare foundation to a close presidential associate.[78] In mid-2001, vice-president and head of PDI-P, Megawati Soekarnoputri, replaced Gus Dur as president. In retribution, Gus Dur's party, National Awakening Party (PKB[79]), provided evidence that ensnared Golkar chairman Akbar Tanjung in his own Bulog-related scandal – this time termed Buloggate II.[80] To prevent the investigation from ensnarling more colleagues, PDI-P and Golkar leaders agreed on offering Ramelan as a political "sacrifice." He was jailed for misappropriating Bulog's off-budget funds.[81]

Megawati needed to accomplish two critical tasks concerning rice. The first was fund-raising for her party and for Golkar, which was instrumental in her ascension to the presidency. For this, she turned to the aforementioned Puspoyo and named him Bulog's chief.[82] Results were unmistakable: According to figures from Indonesia's Central Statistics Bureau (Badan Pusat Statisik, BPS), in 2002, during Megawati's first full calendar year in power, Indonesia imported nearly three times the

[76] Presidential Instruction no. 8 of 2000.

[77] "Kisah di Balik Gus Dur Memecat Jusuf Kalla dan Laksamana Sukardi," alif.id, May 6, 2020 (last accessed October 26, 2023).

[78] Despite arrest, he was eventually exonerated by the Supreme Court. The third party was Soewondo, the president's masseuse (O'Rourke 2002, pp. 388–89; Ridwan and Soewarno 2002, chapter 3).

[79] Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa. Formally, he was impeached by Indonesia's Supreme Parliament (MPR).

[80] Guerin 2003. Akbar's misappropriation occurred earlier but since the scandal broke afterwards, it was named Buloggate II.

[81] Ambardi 2009, pp. 309–20. Golkar factionalism played its part. Akbar's wing helped to topple President Habibie of Golkar with whom Ramelan was associated (Ridwan and Soewarno 2002, chapter 4; Tomsa 2008, pp. 46–52).

[82] The trade and industry minister no longer doubled as the Bulog director.

amount of rice imports than during Gus Dur's first calendar year in power (1.81 million metric tons versus 0.64 million in 2001).[83]

Second, her administration was entrusted with finalizing reforms at Bulog. As a nationalist with a documented distrust of private business, Megawati objected to Bulog's privatization, partial or full. She was an ardent believer in the agency as a faithful protector of the nation's food security, and proud of its success in fulfilling that mission under the New Order and its Green Revolution. It was her government that extended the OPK by turning it into the ongoing Raskin program; it also formally reinstated Bulog's authority as the country's sole rice importer.

But larger structural processes were lurking that jeopardized Bulog's viability, including the country's ambitious post-Soeharto decentralization program. To rectify the coercive centralization of power under Soeharto's New Order, Parliament devolved significant administrative, political, and financial powers to regional governments. Unlike the IMF and World Bank, which were supportive of the measures, Megawati was not. Distrustful of decentralization, she worried about the fissiparous forces it might unleash in a country that had grappled with separatism in the past and was doing so in the present. Megawati was fond of referring to the country by the nationalist acronym of NKRI, or the Unitary Republic of Indonesia.[84]

Under decentralization, regional governments began testing their new-found powers. They floated the idea of assuming control of hundreds of Bulog's lucrative warehouses that were in their jurisdictions. They used the new regional autonomy statute (Law 22 of 1999) to justify their case. They argued that Bulog's functions fell outside those retained by the national government under the new legal framework;[85] accordingly, Bulog's roles in the regions, along with its assets, now fell under their purview. If Bulog's local staff were to become regional civil servants, as the law stipulated (in general, not specific to Bulog), the nationwide coordinating functions of Bulog – the very aspect that saved it from dismemberment during the transition – would be irreparably harmed. A new law or regulation was needed to ward off the predatory designs of regional government. A panoply of powerful interests needed to be sorted out before the drawn-out process could be finalized.

Emblematic of the weakened post-Soeharto state, ministries vied for stewardship of Bulog. The production nationalist Agriculture Ministry

[83] BPS 2005/06, p. 338, table 7.3.11.

[84] Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia. Dutch attempts to institutionalize a federal Indonesia upon their post-WWII return failed.

[85] Judicial matters, foreign affairs, monetary and fiscal policy, religious affairs, and defence and security.

sought oversight; besides for the purpose of capturing rents, it wanted to restrain Bulog's fondness for importing rice. Given Bulog's role in international trade, the Trade and Industry Ministry also voiced its position. It, after all, issued import licenses, and recent ministers had doubled as heads of Bulog. Interests of other ministries also needed addressing. Moreover, deliberations touched on balancing Bulog's commercial activities, like extending oversight over more (nonstaple) commodities, along with social obligations. The latter included procuring paddy from growers and provisioning Raskin as well as military and police rations.[86]

In 2003, the three-year debate mercifully concluded when Megawati placed Bulog under the SOE (state-owned enterprises) Ministry, which was headed by her partymate Laksamana Sukardi. A government regulation (no. 7 of 2003) accorded Bulog with the legal status of a special SOE – special because, unlike other SOEs that on account of IMF agreements were now partially privatized with shares traded on the stock exchange, Bulog would not be partially privatized. With Bulog's new partial profit-orientation, some of its responsibilities for rice price stabilization, including interjecting rice into the market and procuring paddy, were expected to be lessened.

Shortly thereafter, Megawati fortified her administration's protectionist policies that seemed to strike blows against Bulog, at least on paper. In 2003, she raised Gus Dur's tariff on rice imports from Rp. 430 per kilogram to Rp. 750. In the subsequent year, she barred rice imports from arriving one month prior and two months following the main harvest season. (It has been a longstanding grievance of farmers and their advocates in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines that import arrivals near the harvest period were exceptionally pernicious since farmgate prices drop anyway because of the glut in local supply.) As Megawati's government serially extended the seasonal prohibition, the policy morphed into an apparent permanent ban, despite leakages and exceptions. Such rice exporters as Thailand and Vietnam lodged complaints with the WTO.[87]

Drawing on the legacy of her father, President Soekarno (Chapter 1), Megawati had striven to cultivate her image as a populist protector of *wong cilik*, the average poor rice cultivator.[88] Even prior to the tariff increase and seasonal ban, she raised the procurement paddy price from

[86] Yonekura 2005. Bulog lost provisioning rights to civil servants in the 2000 reforms.
[87] Warr 2005, p. 432; Arifin 2007, p. 91. The technocratic Finance Ministry fought the rise to Rp. 750; since the ministry lacks authority over nontaxes, Megawati's government switched to the import ban.
[88] Ziv 2001.

Rp. 1500 to Rp. 1725.[89] (The increase was more tokenistic than a genuine attempt to lift farmers' welfare, especially taking inflation into consideration.) As the APE approach would suggest, Megawati's agricultural protectionism was also electorally driven. Her ban would usefully divert attention from her earlier profligacy in importing rice. Moreover, she headed parliament's largest party, PDI-P (with about 30 percent of the seats), where it enjoyed stout support in the agricultural heartlands of Central and East Java with their tens of millions of voters. Not only was Indonesia preparing to hold its second post-Soeharto parliamentary contest in April 2004, but in July it also would host its inaugural direct presidential election. (Previously, parliamentarians selected the president.) The incumbent had every intention of retaining her presidency.

Yudhoyono's First Term

PDI-P did not fare well in the legislative election. Compared to five years earlier, the party lost about 30 percent of its seats, relegating it to second position in Parliament (surpassed by Golkar). More stingingly for Megawati, she was defeated in the succeeding presidential election by a member of her cabinet and former New Order general, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

Nor were some of Megawati's policies faring well. Roughly half the paddy purchases from farmers were being transacted below the official procurement price that she had raised. Red tape – planters had to submit forms to buy from Bulog, unlike from private dealers – and slumping international rice prices were undercutting the floor price.[90] Meanwhile, facilitated by corruption at the country's ports, smugglers and traders were underinvoicing imports, thereby evading Megawati's tariff and flouting her import ban. (Underreporting was easier than falsifying Trade Ministry–issued permits.)

Megawati's protectionist policies had lasting impact in at least one regard: Starting in mid-2005, rice prices began inching upward; less than a year later, they were up by a third. The World Bank blamed Megawati's import ban.[91] Certainly, less foreign rice was in circulation. According to BPS, the volume of rice imports in 2004 and 2005 was uncommonly low – 0.24 and 0.19 million metric tons, respectively, indicating that Megawati's ban was working to an extent. Or one might prefer referencing international sources. They typically publish rice import volumes for

[89] Presidential Instruction no. 9 of 2002.
[90] Arifin 2008, p. 163, table 6.6.
[91] World Bank 2006, p. xviii.

Indonesia two to three times above official volumes by likely capturing the illegal rice entering the country. These arguably more accurate amounts still would have been considerably below the official import figure of 1.43 million metric tons recorded for 2003.[92]

The predicament provoked a number of reactions. Defiantly pointing to the nearly four percent increase in paddy production from 2003 to 2004, Yudhoyono's agriculture minister refused to take responsibility for the price rise. And although harvests stagnated between 2004 and 2005 (at 54.1 million metric tons), this uninspiring performance would not warrant a price rise of such magnitude. The minister instead speculated that Bulog's mismanagement of the public stockpile and its leaky distribution system were probable causes.[93]

This episode of rice inflation also raised questions over how the new president, a self-professed reformer, would respond. Would he rescind the policy of the vanquished Megawati and resort to rice imports? Yudhoyono must have been aware that price increases of the country's staple good were hurting poor Indonesians. In a 2001 paper well known to policymakers, a local economist found that a ten percent rise in rice prices would result in about a one percent increase in poverty due to a drop in purchasing power.[94] Then, in 2006, nearly corroborating the study, BPS announced that, from early 2005 to early 2006, slightly over 3 million Indonesians fell below the poverty line, raising poverty from 16.0 to 17.8 percent. The World Bank insisted that about three-quarters of this rise was a result of rice price increases. Its findings were resoundingly rebuked by production nationalists, including economists and commentators, in the domestic press.[95]

Yudhoyono temporized on the rice import issue. His government believed that the Raskin program would blunt the price increases for the most food-insecure. In October 2005, the president announced another ambitious anti-poverty program where 19 million poor households would receive direct cash transfers of Rp. 30,000 (about US$3) per quarter for one year. The program was intended to offset the nearly 90 percent rise in fuel prices Yudhoyono's government had instituted,

[92] The Rice Report (based in Bangkok) uses export numbers of sending countries. For different import figures for Indonesia, see Sawit and Lokollo (2007, p. 69, table 5.1) and Rosner and McCulloch (2008, p. 89, table 4).

[93] "Menteri Pertanian: Manajemen Stok dan Distribusui Bulog Masih Lemah," bisnis.tempo.co, February 17, 2007 (last accessed October 25, 2023).

[94] Ikhsan 2001; Arifin 2008, p. 154.

[95] World Bank 2006, p. xviii; "Bank Dunia Tidak Pahami Soal Beras," *Kompas*, November 16, 2006; "Inflasi, Kemisikan, dan Beras," *Kompas*, November 23, 2006.

and there was hope that the cash might also help in softening the impact of higher rice prices.[96]

Even so, why did Yudhoyono simply not import enough rice to suppress prices, as the country did with intended effect in 1998? Cost was not a factor. The estimated government expenditure for Raskin in 2005 was about US$650 million.[97] Instead of spending the money on a program for which, according to audits, perhaps up to half the supplies were disappearing, for a similar level of expenditure, Indonesia could have imported a massive 2.2 million metric tons of rice.[98] Not only would have imports of this magnitude pushed down rice prices appreciably, but interjecting the foodstuff into the market also is administratively easier than distributing the grain to millions of targeted households across an archipelago that is as wide as the continental United States and whose infrastructure stock was in rapid decline.[99]

Less so than in Malaysia, rice imports were a hot-button issue, and the freshly elected Yudhoyono preferred not to pay the political price for them. Had he opened the import faucet, his critics would have branded him an import lover, or worse, a neoliberal. In late 2005, when word leaked that his government was deliberating whether to import rice, Yudhoyono reacted defensively to grumblings on the ground. He was quoted as saying: "We import foodstuffs only when forced … . Because of this don't misinterpret the provision of rice import permits. I ask for your understanding."[100]

Yudhoyono was denied the understanding he had sought. Hypocritically, Megawati took pot shots at her rival, expressing surprise that the president would even moot the idea.[101] (Although Megawati had lost the presidential race, she remained a prominent figure in Indonesian politics whom Yudhoyono could not easily dismiss. Her party held nearly twice the parliamentary seats that the president's new party, the Democrat Party, had.) PDI-P functionaries followed suit. PDI-P governors in Central Java and East Java promised to ban or confiscate foreign rice from their rice-surplus provinces. Party branch offices offered to be

[96] Wisnu, Basri, and Putra 2015. The direct cash assistance in Indonesian was known as BLT (Bantuan Langsung Tunai).
[97] World Bank 2012, p. 14, table 2.
[98] Ibid., p. 4. The Bangkok price then was about US$290 per ton (fred.stlouisfed.org).
[99] On declining infrastructure, see Davidson (2015).
[100] "SBY: Jangan Salah Paham Soal Izin Impor Beras," finance.detik.com, December 9, 2005 (last accessed May 6, 2022).
[101] "Megawati Kritik Kebijakan Pemerintah," antaranews.com, January 11, 2006 (last accessed October 25, 2023).

the governors' eyes and ears on the ground.[102] Heads of other large parties – PKB, PAN, and PKS, along with PDI-P[103]– seized the mantle of production nationalism and threatened a parliamentary inquiry if Yudhoyono imported substantial quantities of rice.[104] Beyond Parliament, farmer organizations, including the Indonesian Farmers' Association (HKTI) and Federation of Indonesian Farmers' Unions (FSPI), joined the anti-import chorus.[105]

If the World Bank, based on official Indonesian census data, showed that about 80 percent of Indonesian households, and about 70 percent of poor farming households, were net consumers of rice, meaning that high rice prices were harming their welfare, why would farmer organizations reject a solution that included imports?[106] That these two associations with different (political) orientations – although neither is a true mass organization – would together oppose rice imports demonstrates the degree of politicization and unpopularity of rice imports in democratic Indonesia.

HKTI was the New Order's corporatist organization that feigned representing the rural masses.[107] After Soeharto's ouster, it became a vehicle for national politicians to mobilize votes and to gain access to government largess, including Prabowo Subianto, Indonesia's future president (see below). Prabowo was HKTI's second head in the post-Soeharto era. Further down the organization's hierarchy, HKTI members include medium-to-large paddy farmers, who might generate surpluses and thus gain from elevated farmgate prices when harvests are good (although this is not automatic). These same farmers sometimes serve as village officials or at least constitute the village elite with close ties to officialdom that ensure steady access to government assistance programs. These include fertilizer and seed subsidies as well as other loan schemes, from which poorer farmers are often excluded.[108]

Unlike HKTI, FSPI was established amid the flourishing of civil society associations and grassroots organizing following Soeharto's fall. Its founders were mostly farmer advocates, although smallholders did number among the group. Together, they became the Indonesian

[102] "Beras Impor di Jawa Tengah Akan Dirazia," nasional.tempo.co, February 27, 2007 (last accessed October 25, 2023).
[103] PAN: Partai Amanat Negara (National Mandate Party); PKS: Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (The Prosperous and Justice Party).
[104] Riawanti 2015, p. 167, table 7.1.
[105] HKTI: Himpunan Kerukunan Tani Indonesia; FSPI: Federasi Serikat Petani.
[106] World Bank 2006, pp. xxiii–xxiv, figure 5.
[107] White 2016, p. 13. It meant to fill the void of rural organizations following the 1965/66 massacres (chapter 1).
[108] Graham 2024, pp. 147–50, 165.

champion of the worldwide, pro-small-scale farmer movement, La Via Campesina. This movement promotes farmer rights and autonomy and decries corporate domination of the global food system. It rejects neoliberal understandings of food security, as represented by the FAO and World Bank, that favor an international trade-based approach.[109] SPI, as it later became known, instead prioritizes the concept of food sovereignty. Its foundational belief is that the people, but especially small-scale commodity producers, have the right to participate in policy-making that prioritizes improving access to locally grown food that is affordable, diverse, nutritious, and culturally resonant.[110]

Finally, in early 2007, with rice prices up by some 15 percent in 2006 alone, Yudhoyono bowed to pressure from within his cabinet, despite objections from the Agriculture Ministry. Not only was Bulog tasked with securing up to one million metric tons, but the government also reasserted the agency's monopoly rights over rice imports.[111] The Trade Ministry twice lowered the rice import tariff, until it reached Rp. 450 per kilogram.[112]

One seasoned observer described this change in decision-making as the "economic realists" triumphing over the agricultural lobby, or in the terminology of this book, the production nationalists.[113] While not wrong, this viewpoint skirts pertinent political matters. As in the case of Megawati, Yudhoyono's electoral calculations must be taken into account. While the president was hesitant to spend the necessary but costly political capital on rice imports early in his first term, this (in)decision raised the stakes for two complementary developments with potential to doom his reelection chances in 2009. One was runaway rice prices. From Megawati's ban to early 2008, wholesale prices had nearly doubled, which threatened to push inflation to uncomfortable levels.[114] The other was large imports. Their proximate arrival during the presidential campaign would leave Yudhoyono susceptible to the crippling charge of being anti-*wong cilik*. In short, the timing of these purchases

[109] Edelman and Borras 2016. (F)SPI is merely representative of this politics. Another umbrella food sovereignty NGO is the Consortium for Agrarian Reform.
[110] Peluso, Affif, and Rachman 2008. Land reform has barely advanced in democratic Indonesia (Rachman 2017).
[111] "Impor Beras Wewenang Bulog," bisnis.tempo.com, March 5, 2007 (last accessed October 24, 2023).
[112] "Tak Bisa Hidup Tanpa Beras – Bulog Riwayatmu Kini," beritaindonesia.co.id, March 16, 2007 (last accessed May 6, 2022).
[113] Arifin 2008, p.170.
[114] McCulloch and Timmer 2008. This rise includes the late 2007 increases due to the onset of the regional rice crisis.

mattered. It was not by chance that he agreed to substantial rice imports halfway through his first term.

By then, Yudhoyono caught two breaks in succession. The first was a commodity boom; beginning in 2005, it was fueled by demand from India and China. Indonesia annually was exporting tens of billions of US dollars' worth of nickel, coal, and palm oil.[115] This windfall not only made the cost of Yudhoyono's 2007 rice imports (about US$ 465 million) seem negligible, but it also dulled the president's incentive to initiate wide-ranging but risky liberalizing economic reforms.[116] Tellingly, he tasked Bulog with handling the majority of these rice imports.

Yudhoyono' second break was the 2008 regional rice crisis. As noted in Chapter 3 with regard to Malaysia, from late 2007 to mid-2008, international rice prices tripled, peaking at slightly over US$1000 per metric ton. Whereas the crisis was like a tsunami crashing into Malaysia and especially in the Philippines (Chapter 5), the crisis's waves gently lapped Indonesia's shores. The difference principally had to do with the wide availability of rice and enhanced procurement efforts by Bulog in the field that kept prices relatively stable. Two sources contributed to this availability. First, paddy production continued its upward trajectory thanks to, first, incentivized growers, who sought to capture gains from higher farmgate prices and, second, to favorable weather.[117] From 54.5 million tons in 2006, national totals rose to 60.3 million by 2008 for nearly an 11 percent increase. This trend appeared to strengthen the arguments and policies of the production nationalists from the Agriculture Ministry and elsewhere against the pro-trade proscriptions of the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO, and other mainstream economists.[118] Years later, in a discussion with two members of the country's Food Security Council, they insisted that IFIs simply do not understand Indonesia's approach to paddy cultivation and that every country has the right to pursue self-sufficiency if it chooses so. Selectively relying on history, they proudly spoke of Soeharto's Green Revolution success (forgetting the role the IFIs played in that project) and subsequent accomplishments, including that of Yudhoyono's.[119] What they did not broach was Yudhoyono's sizable rice imports, the second source of rice availability. In hindsight, these purchases proved prescient.

[115] Papanek, Pardede, and Nazara 2014, p. 46. [116] Davidson 2018, pp. 31–32.
[117] Apriyantono, Irianto, Suyamto, *et al.* 2009, pp. 15–17; Saifullah 2010.
[118] For example, see Barichello and Patunru (2009).
[119] Interview, Sudirman Naman and Eddy Suntoro, Jakarta, May 19, 2016. This is the same source for this chapter's epigraph. That quote was in response to them learning that I worked in Singapore.

Yudhoyono's Second Term

In the aftermath of averting the 2008 rice crisis and in the context of the 2009 election campaign, Yudhoyono proudly proclaimed that Indonesia had achieved self-sufficiency in rice. Despite the dubiousness of the data upon which he based his claim,[120] imports in the lead-up to the 2009 elections were minimal – 0.29 million metric tons in 2008, 0.25 million in 2009. As a result, Yudhoyono avoided being branded anti-*wong cilik*. This, along with the other populist measure of distributing massive direct cash transfers (BTL) immediately prior to the election, financed by the commodity boom, contributed to his reelection. Whereas in the 2004 presidential contest Megawati received enough votes to force a second round of voting, this time Yudhoyono defeated her decisively, rendering a run-off moot.

The pattern of rice imports under Yudhoyono's second term closely resembled that of his first term. Following his second win, he delayed large purchases by a year. That he resorted to imports in his second year did not astound his critics, but their sheer volume (2.8 million metric tons) and cost (US$1.5 billion) did. Given the country's slow but steady paddy output, Yudhoyono's government had difficulty in justifying the biggest binge since the open policy days of 1998 and 1999. It fell to Bulog's new head, Sutarto Alimoeso, described as the president's schoolmate, to explain.[121] Sutarto asserted that Bulog's inventory had reached dangerously low levels due to increased demands for the Raskin program. The latter claim was verifiable – in 2008 Bulog's Raskin supplies were up by 80 percent from 2006.[122] The former claim was not – Bulog's stocks are not subject to public oversight. Seeking to mollify critics, Sutarto promised that the foreign rice would not be sold on the market but only used to bolster government reserves.[123] Usual suspects decried the purchases – Megawati, farmer organizations, and most political parties. The latter threatened to reject the president's 2012 budget for Bulog if rice imports continued. By 2013, import volumes returned to normal levels.[124]

[120] "Swasembada Pangan; Klaim Diatas Kertas Belaka," arahkiri2009.blogspot.com, April 17, 2009 (last accessed October 25, 2023).
[121] "Lost in the Field," thejakartapost.com, July 26, 2011 (last accessed October 25, 2023).
[122] World Bank 2012, p. 14, table 2.
[123] "BULOG: Impor Beras Demi Ketahanan Pangan tak akan Dijual," republika.co.id, August 9, 2011 (last accessed October 25, 2023).
[124] "DPR Ancam Tahan Anggaran Bulog," hukumonline.com, March 14, 2011 (last accessed October 25, 2023). Mired in corruption scandals, his party performed poorly in the 2014 legislative elections. From about 2 million metric tons in 2012, imports dropped to 0.47 in 2012 and 0.87 in 2013 (according to BPS figures).

The discord over the enormous 2011 purchases was soon lost in the din of debates over a new food bill that was circulating in Parliament. The urgency of climate change, the globalization of food-value chains, the weakened position of the central government because of decentralization, and the lingering worries from 2008 regional rice crisis combined to convince lawmakers to update the 1996 food statute.[125] But the waxing political potency of the president also mattered, as did the timing. Having just won reelection, Yudhoyono's political capital was at its peak. With parliamentary coalition members in tow, he used the first half of his second term to enact difficult legislation. In 2012, for instance, he had Parliament pass an act on the sensitive topic of involuntary land acquisition. The way Soeharto's government had seized lands for projects, dubiously in the public interest, that enriched his inner circle left bitter legacies. The democratic state needed to retain reasonable eminent domain powers to improve the decaying stock of infrastructure, yet it was expected to acquire land compulsorily in a fairer and more just manner.[126]

The food bill that Yudhoyono signed into law (no. 18) in 2012 also spurred criticism from many quarters. Foreign market liberals decried its abundant protectionist provisions, as did officials in the Trade and Finance ministries. The latter worried that stringent protectionism might conflict with WTO regulations and deter foreign investment. Meanwhile, rural activists and agricultural officials denounced the act's neoliberal bias and pro-trade measures.[127] Joining them were most parties in Parliament.[128] Expressing outrage over the regularity of rice imports and insisting that noneconomic considerations must not be discounted, they once again played the role of production nationalists.

While the 2012 law references food security (*ketahanan pangan*), food availability (*ketersedian pangan*), and food self-sufficiency (*kemandirian pangan*), at its center of gravity lies the nationalist notion of food sovereignty (*kedaulatan pangan*). But unlike activist understandings of the concept, here it does not rest with the people. Instead, it is vested in the guiding hands of a strong, independent sovereign central state. It is the authoritative determiner of food policy in Indonesia. In ideal terms, it is committed to providing the nation (*bangsa*) with the utmost protection.

[125] Vel, McCarthy, and Zen 2016; Neilson and Wright 2017.
[126] Davidson 2015, pp. 147–55.
[127] "Food Self-Sufficiency Goal Starves Poor Consumers, OECD Declares," thejakartaglobe.com, October 11, 2012 (last accessed December 23, 2012); "Inilah Kritik SPI Terhadap UU Pangan," berdikarionline.com, October 24, 2012 (last accessed October 26, 2023).
[128] Respatiadi 2023, chapter 4.

In many respects, the Food Law was the political and legislative expression of a forceful economic nationalism that had emerged from the 2005–12 commodity boom. Economic nationalism is longstanding in Indonesia. But given the battering the country took during the 1997/98 AFC as the IMF sought to impose liberalization, such sentiments were ripe for a reawakening. The competition with Indonesian capital brought about by the foreign investment that poured into the country as a result of the commodity boom provided the grist for this ideological revitalization. Economic nationalism was used as a weapon to ensure that Indonesian businessmen and party elites, as well as central and local governments, secured financial windfalls from the steep increase in prices of the country's natural resources. (Some observers labelled it resource nationalism.[129]) Burgeoning economic nationalism laid the groundwork for a more statist approach to economic development and management in Indonesia, led by Yudhoyono's successor (see below).

If the Food Law was a legislative articulation of economic nationalism, the establishment of a new super-agency designed to oversee Indonesia's food system was its institutional embodiment.[130] The new law mandated the agency's formation within three years. Not coincidentally, Yudhoyono was slated to step down in two, according to constitutional procedures. Late in his second term, the president appeared more interested in rebuilding Bulog's assets and powers than building a new institution from which he would not be able to enjoy its munificence. Yudhoyono returned responsibilities over such staple commodities as sugar, beef, and soybeans to Bulog; the IMF had stripped them from the agency during the AFC.[131] The lame-duck president left the trying task of establishing the super-agency, and coping with the infighting that it entailed, to his successor. This president similarly avoided the quagmire for years until a once-in-a-century exogenous shock forced his hand.

Jokowi's First Term

Differences between the 2014 presidential candidates were striking. Joko "Jokowi" Widodo was portrayed as democratic, pluralist, internationalist; his opponent, Prabowo Subianto, a former New Order general with an atrocious human rights record, was described as pugnacious, resolutely

[129] Habir 2013; Warburton 2023.

[130] On a similar 2013 law ostensibly protecting farmers, see Respatiadi (2023, chapter 4).

[131] A Ministry Trade regulation (no. 19 of 2014) stipulates Bulog's right to import medium rice; with licenses traders could import specialty rice and rice for food manufacturing. "Bulog Akan Kegera Kembali ke Fungsi Awal," merdeka.com, July 27, 2012 (last accessed October 26, 2023).

Islamic, ultra-nationalist.[132] Yet on rice, both promised to raise cultivation in order to render imports historical artefacts, as Megawati and Yudhoyono had pledged before them.[133] Exploiting production nationalism, Prabowo pressed the issue first, forcing Jokowi to follow his rival's vow of self-sufficiency. (As a former mayor of a mid-size city in Central Java and governor of Jakarta, Jokowi lacked experience in agriculture.) In a televised debate, Jokowi tried to mask his reactiveness by (awkwardly) blaming Prabowo, as head of HKTI, for Yudhoyono's import binge.[134] At the time, the polemics surrounding rice imports were unavoidable, as another scandal was brewing in Yudhoyono's outgoing administration. Importers were bringing in regular medium-quality rice via permits for special varieties (like basmati). The public uproar apparently forced Yudhoyono's trade minister, whose ministry was responsible for issuing the permits, to resign from his position.[135]

Jokowi's unfamiliarity with agriculture was evident. The new president expressed surprise at learning plots on average were yielding four to five tons per hectare (as they had for decades). In addition to pledging to double these yields, like Yudhoyono before him, this president from PDI-P vowed achieving self-sufficiency in rice before the end of his five-year term.[136]

Unlike presidents before him, Jokowi couched his goal in the language of food sovereignty, following the spirit of the 2012 Food Law.[137] He also appointed a (woman) professional, not a party figure or crony, to lead Bulog. The appointee, Lenny Sugihat, had been working in a state bank (the Peoples Bank of Indonesia, BRI). Jokowi styled himself as a reformer and had campaigned on cleaning up the country's institutional corruption. The move also fit his state-led development vision by strengthening ties across state institutions.

To achieve his ambitious rice target, Jokowi decided to broaden his aspiring infrastructure expansion plans, a focal point of his campaign, to include agriculture. Besides the airports, highways, and electricity

[132] Davidson 2018. [133] Prabowo was Megawati's 2009 vice-presidential running mate.
[134] "Prabowo: Saya Dulu Ditegur Pak JK Karena Tolak Impor Beras," viva.co.id, July 5, 2014 (last accessed October 26, 2023). HKTI is represented on the Food Security Council.
[135] "Mundur dari Kabinet, Gita Wirjawan Sangkal Terkait Kisruh Impor Beras," tribunnews.com, January 31, 2014 (last accessed October 26, 2023).
[136] On yields over time, see Otsuka 2021, p. 326, figure 3. "Jokowi Janji Produksi Padi Sedikitnya 8 Ton/Hektare," ekonomibisnis.com, September 4, 2014 (last accessed October 26, 2023); "Jokowi Aims for Food Self-Sufficiency in Three Years," thejakartapost.com, December 27 2014 (last accessed October 26, 2023).
[137] Achieving food sovereignty became part of his governing philosophy called Nawacita (Wihardja 2019).

capacity that he promised to build, he would direct resources toward irrigation, in which the construction of 49 new dams figured prominently. But a question remained: How would Jokowi finance *all* this construction in the face of waning commodity prices? For starters, he ditched Yudhoyono's sputtering public–private partnership approach and devised a state-driven plan.[138] He slashed billions in US dollars from the government's fuel subsidies bill (which was mostly benefiting the well-off and was something that Yudhoyono showed an unwillingness to do). Jokowi's 2015 state budget on capital expenditure reflected the immediate windfall: At about Rp. 290 trillion (US$21.5 billion), it was up by almost 90 percent from Yudhoyono's final budget.[139]

With attention focused on these matters, Jokowi was tardy in issuing a presidential instruction on rice price stabilization. In response, rice traders sensed an opportunity: They ran rice prices up as high as 25 percent in early 2015. Jokowi angrily summoned representatives from Perpadi and the traders' association based at Jakarta's largest rice market (in Cipinang, East Jakarta, see Figure 4.1) to the Presidential Palace to account for the price spike.[140] The sit-down invoked the way Soeharto would call ministers or businessmen to the palace for a dressing-down. The jump in prices tested Jokowi's pledge to forgo rice imports for the early part of his administration. With his presidential rice instruction issued in March (No. 5 of 2015), prices retreated.

Lacking hard evidence to act against the traders, Jokowi directed his anger elsewhere. He fired Sugihat, ostensibly for failing to fulfil procurement targets, and replaced her with another BRI official, Djarot Kusumayakti, the bank's director.[141] Bulog found itself in a bind. It was not tardy in announcing a decree on rice price stabilization. As prices rose, private traders reacted swiftly and paid farmers higher prices than Bulog could. Bulog's changed status, moreover, rendered it a quasi-commercial entity. It was supposed to be more autonomous and capable of fending off direct government pressure, while also lessening procurement responsibilities to concentrate on for-profit activities, from investing in high-tech milling to modernizing its warehouse system.

[138] Davidson 2015, chapter 4.

[139] For the 2016 budget, the figure rose to Rp. 313 trillion (Negara 2016).

[140] "Jokowi Holds Meeting Discussing Rice Prices, Inflation Rate," thejakartapost.com March 4, 2015 (last accessed October 26, 2023). The Cipinang Rice Traders Cooperative backed Prabowo in the election (Graham 2020b).

[141] Jokowi's anger was reported in "Jokowi Ngamuk Soal Harga Beras, Begini Cerita JK," nasional.tempo.com, March 24, 2015 (last accessed October 26, 2023). We can only speculate as to why BRI officials were appointed head of Bulog consecutively. Perhaps Bulog and the bank were cooperating (colluding?) on special loan packages.

Figure 4.1 Cipinang rice market, Jakarta's largest.
(Credit/*Bay Ismoyo/AFP via Getty Images*)

The leadership change portended a period of difficulty for Bulog. Jokowi's administration revamped the Raskin program. Jokowi envisioned expanded social assistance programs as a cornerstone of his administration; with its scattershot targeting of households and steady leakages, Raskin was ill-suited to realize this vision. In 2017, Jokowi's team piloted (then expanded) a two-prong scheme. Through one prong – called the Non-Cash Food Assistance program (BPNT – Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai) – beneficiaries received an electronic voucher with which to purchase rice and eggs at local markets in order to increase protein intake and to help stimulate local economies.[142] The second prong – called Rastra (*Beras untuk Keluarga Sejahtera*, or Rice for Prosperous Families) – resembled Raskin, but was smaller in scale, since Rastra was only meant to accompany the BPNT program. This change meant Bulog would be distributing much less rice. Bulog was even forced to relinquish program management to the Ministry of Social Affairs.[143]

That Bulog distributed 1.29 million metric tons of Raskin/Rastra rice in 2018, compared to 2.79 million in 2016, was cause for alarm.[144] The

[142] The shift from "recipients" to "beneficiaries" represented a philosophical change behind the program; it was later expanded to other essential commodities (McCarthy and Sumatro 2018).
[143] Octania 2021.
[144] "Masalah Bulog di Masa Buwas, dari Hilangnya Rastra hingga Mafia Beras," katadata.co.id, December 9, 2019 (last accessed October 26, 2023).

steep drop added to the agency's debt burden. With excess rice stored in warehouses – some of which was rotting – its debt in 2018 more than doubled to Rp. 28 trillion (about US$2.2 billion). Substantial revenue loss played its part. Bulog had been earning 75 to 80 percent of its formal revenue through state support of Raskin.[145] Then there was the loss in informal earnings. With less rice to be distributed, rent opportunities dwindled for Bulog officials and connected rice traders. Evidently, the latter, led by Perpadi's national head, Sutarto Alimoeso, still drew Jokowi's ire. Recall that Sutarto had headed Bulog under Yudhoyono and helped to orchestrate the 2011 rice import splurge.

How to direct Bulog puzzled Jokowi. He had published instructions and regulations that emphasized its role in achieving national food security/sovereignty and in securing rice price stabilization. He tasked it with managing an enlarged stock of government reserves (of around 500,000 metric tons) and in 2016 issued a decree (no. 46) that expanded Bulog's supervisory role, including price stabilization, over eleven basic commodities.[146] Yet the president's waning trust in the agency was evidenced by putting the Social Affairs Ministry in charge of his BPTN program. Outside Bulog circles, this management change was not deemed controversial. Controversy arose instead over the way Jokowi was placing his trust in the army to actualize his food security/sovereignty goals.

Unlike Yudhoyono, Jokowi was not a retired general. Before entering politics, he sold furniture. Yudhoyono's stature had prevented officers from overtly interfering with civilian affairs. Unlike in Thailand or in the Philippines, even coup attempts or related rumors hardly surfaced during Yudhoyono's decade in office. (That same stature kept Yudhoyono from pursuing significant reforms, like curtailing the army's use of off-budget funding derived from its business networks.[147]) With Jokowi's win, even as Indonesia's democracy consolidated, Jokowi felt compelled to draw former military officers close by offering them strategic government posts. The contrasting fates of prior presidents were evident: Megawati, an ardent army supporter, survived her (albeit abbreviated) term in office; Gus Dur, who antagonized the army, did not. A number of retired – and controversial – generals held prominent cabinet positions during Jokowi's first term.

Jokowi increasingly securitized his food policies by drawing on the New Order practice of using the army to oversee development projects,

[145] "Indonesia's Bulog Wants $1.42 Bln Government Funding for Rice Procurement," reuters.com, November 21, 2019 (last accessed October 26, 2023).
[146] The other ten: maize, soybeans, sugar, cooking oil, wheat flour, onions, chilies, beef, chicken, and eggs.
[147] Human Rights Watch 2010.

through which it could monitor the local populace. Principally, this occurred via the revitalization of a village-level noncommissioned army post (Babinsa); it had been abolished during the transition to reduce army surveillance of rural Indonesian life. The army was also requested to protect supply lines of subsidized fertilizer from illegal diversion to the plantation sector. (In 2016, the government allocated Rp. 30.1 trillion, or about US$2.3 billion, for fertilizer subsidies).[148] Army personnel furthermore were tasked with preparing new rice fields in Outer Island provinces. Many of these same provinces, including restive West Papua, host large food estates. The Defense Ministry has been instrumental in the planning and monitoring of these projects, while the army has large financial stakes in the natural resource trade in and around the sites.[149]

Jokowi's grappling with the interstices of institutional power and the politics of food provisioning in democratic Indonesia extended beyond the army. Scandals and cases also involved political party dynamics. Although Jokowi won the 2014 presidency as a member of PDI-P, Parliament's largest party, Prabowo cobbled together the larger coalition, with 68 percent of the body's seats. (This weakened position in part explains why Jokowi gravitated to the army.) In response, Jokowi's team steadily chipped away at Prabowo's lead by meddling in the internal affairs of coalition partners to spur defections. It returned Golkar, Parliament's second party, to the fold. Prabowo's Gerindra Party, Yudhoyono's Democrat Party, and the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) held out.

Jokowi seized opportunities to punish political opponents outside of Parliament. In 2017, a police raid on a warehouse outside Jakarta discovered evidence that a wholesaler was repackaging low-quality rice and selling it at premium grade prices. Share prices of the firm's parent company, Tiga Pilar Sejahtera (TPS), tumbled as a result; two company officials were convicted on money laundering charges.[150] Concern was high within Jokowi's administration that large wholesalers and millers were dominating marketing channels.[151] TPS's targeting was hardly coincidental. Its president commissioner, Anton Apriyantono, was a high-ranking member of PKS. (As the agriculture minister in

[148] Osorio, Abriningrum, Armas, *et. al* 2011; Patunru and Respatiadi 2017, p. 11, table 4.
[149] Hidayana, Prihantoro, and Saragih 2021; Tapol and awasMifee! 2022.
[150] "Hakim PN Jaksel Vonis 2 Mantan Direktur Tiga Pilar Sejahtera (AISA) 3 Tahun Penjara," nasional.kontan.co.id, August 1, 2020 (last accessed October 26, 2023).
[151] Others included Buyung Poetra Sembada, Sumber Energi Pangan, and Lumbung Padi Indonesia ("Ketua KKPU: Jika Ada Permainan 'Mafia' Beras, KKPU Akan Tindak Tegas," *Kompetisi*, Edition 51, 2015, p. 29) (kppu.go.id; last accessed October 26, 2023).

Yudhoyono's first cabinet, Anton was connected to several import scandals, especially of beef, although he was never charged.[152])

Another case that pertained to rice imports entangled Jokowi's own cabinet ministers. In 2017, his government sought to cap rising rice retail prices. But with low levels of foreign rice in circulation due to Jokowi's vow to minimize imports – imports averaged about one million tons per year from 2014 to 2016 – prices broke through the ceiling prices published by the government. Jokowi's decision to hike imports sparked two revealing public debates – one familiar but with a twist, the other novel.

This time the job of publicly defending the imports fell to Enggartiasto Lukita, the trade minister. (Recall that this ministry issued the import permits.) He borrowed the well-worn justification that imports would not hurt farmers' income since they would be only used to support public reserves.[153] Yet the anti-import campaign was not being fronted by the usual suspects – the agriculture minister, Megawati, Prabowo, or farmer organizations. Peculiarly, Bulog's new head was directing the opposition. A former police general with close ties to PDI-P, Budi Waseso replaced Kusumayakti in 2018, further securitizing food policy ahead of the 2019 elections.

Leaning on solid production and procurement figures, Waseso insisted that Bulog's stocks were sufficient to tame prices and that nearly full warehouses were incapable of accommodating over two million tons of new imports. According to Enggartiasto, overcapacity at Bulog warehouses was not his ministry's concern.[154] Enggartiasto was no stranger to abusing Bulog for political battles: As a member of Golkar, his name surfaced in the aforementioned scandal of Akbar Tanjung, who spent Bulog charity funds on the 1999 election campaign.[155] Enggartiasto since had joined the new political party of media mogul Surya Paloh. As Paloh's Nasdem Party had backed Jokowi in the presidential election, he was beholden to his oligarchic ally and prized donor. Counting on similar support for the 2019 elections, including favorable media coverage,[156] the president could ill afford to antagonize Paloh or

[152] "WikiLeaks: AS Tuduh Menteri Anton Korup," viva.co.id, August 25, 2011 (last accessed October 26, 2023).
[153] "Mendag Jamin Beras Impor tak Rugikan Petani," kumpuran.com, January 18, 2018 (last accessed October 26, 2023).
[154] "Buwas 17 Bulan Jadi Dirut Bulog, Ini Daftar Kontroversinya," bisnis.tempo.co, September 20, 2019 (last accessed October 26, 2023).
[155] Tomsa 2008, p. 212, n. 37.
[156] Tapsell 2017, p. 76. Nasdem – National Democrat (Nasional Demokrat) – is the formal name of this party.

Enggartiasto, who knew full well that the large rents derived from the imports could finance party activities.

The Trade Ministry-Bulog spat also spawned a long-overdue public debate, one noted in this book's Introduction: Questions were raised over the accuracy of the data upon which rice import decisions were based. For years, foreign and domestic experts alike knew of the data inaccuracies and that ministries and agencies relied upon conflicting estimates. Overseeing production, the Agriculture Ministry had tended to inflate paddy totals; its 2018 estimate was about one-third higher than that of BPS. One cause for this variance is due to uncertain estimates of the area devoted to rice cultivation. The Agriculture Ministry's estimate for Java diverged by about 17 percent points from that of BPS.

But data is also actively manipulated. Consider regional branch offices, or those of local government. They overestimate numbers to fulfil (unrealistic) targets set by higher-ups, or to justify increases in resources – for example, of subsidized fertilizers that are often resold illegally. Estimates of other data that factor into decisions on import volumes, such as per capita rice consumption or milling recovery rates, have been equally suspect.[157] Nor are government stockpiles, as noted above, available for independent oversight.

This time the debate prompted Jokowi's administration to announce steps in improving data collection. If implemented in earnest, they might amount to the most significant reforms in the rice sector since the IMF's ill-fated liberalization in 1998. Less politicized agencies – BPS, the National Institute of Aeronautics and Space, and the Geospatial Information Agency – were to deploy geospatial information in conjunction with satellite technology and a single map (or reference data scheme) to better estimate acreage devoted to wet-rice cultivation.[158] How geospatial data would improve estimates of per capita consumption, or whether Jokowi would open government stockpiles to public inspection, were other matters. In 2018, after the Agriculture Ministry's production data predictably registered about one-third higher than that of BPS, Jokowi announced that only BPS's data would be used for policymaking on rice. He expected ministries and agencies to toe the line.[159]

[157] Arifin 2007, pp. 35–40; Gafar 2007, p. 40; Rosner and McCulloch 2008; Ruslan 2019. Recovery rates are the reduction in weight as dried paddy is milled into rice. The government estimate (63.5 percent) glosses tremendous variation, making use of a single statistic questionable. For rice per capita consumption, published figures range from 97.6 kg per year to 114.8 and even 135.

[158] Ruslan 2019.

[159] "Rice Stocks Deplete, Govt Ministries Split Over Plan to Import Rice," thejakartapost.com, December 7, 2022 (last accessed November 11, 2023).

Jokowi's Second Term

Jokowi sought to avoid unanticipated controversies that would threaten reelection. Sparring over rice imports was one campaign debate that Jokowi's team must have anticipated. Prabowo, the two-time challenger, adduced the 2018 rice import surge and the cabinet infighting over it as signs of the failure and dysfunctionality of Jokowi's administration. After the production nationalist renewed his pledge to ban rice imports, Jokowi defended his record. Imports, he pleaded, were necessary only to stabilize prices and that production strengthened under his watch.[160]

Like Yudhoyono before him, Jokowi won reelection, despite rising rice prices. When Jokowi was elected in 2014, average retail prices in Indonesia were slightly twice that of world prices; five years later, when he defeated Prabowo for the second time, they were about two and two-thirds higher.[161] These prices were probably appreciated by the country's larger-scale planters.[162] Also like Yudhoyono, after binging on rice imports, Jokowi curtailed them drastically in the year prior to the election (from 2.25 million metric tons to 440,000). Finally, similar to his predecessor, Jokowi used the power of reelection to pass challenging legislation. While Yudhoyono had focused on eminent domain and food, among others, Jokowi concentrated on the economy and industrial relations by rushing through Parliament a contentious law on job creation that was enacted in late 2020. In a noticeable, and for many surprising, pivot from his state-led development agenda, Jokowi sought to open the economy to foreign direct investment beyond the natural resource sector to further his infrastructure ambitions, including the building of food estates. Reviving the moribund manufacturing sector also was deemed vital to improve Indonesia's poor standing in global supply chains.[163] Provisions in the law (no. 11 of 2020) took aim at labor's post-Soeharto increased leverage by weakening regulations on firing and readjusting wages. Loud protests were to no avail.[164]

This business-friendly act still fell short of rice liberalization. Even if government technocrats worried that the 2012 law's protectionist measures had left the country vulnerable to potential WTO sanctions, after eight long years that law's legal status had become uncertain. Jokowi's

[160] Paddy output rose marginally from 57.0 million tons in 2015/16 to 58.3 million in 2017/18. The large drop to 54.7 million in 2019 happened too late to affect the May 2019 election.

[161] Patunru and Ilham 2019, p. 9, figure 4.

[162] Hamilton-Hart 2019.

[163] In its sectoral contribution to the economy, industry stagnated 13 to 14 percent from 2012 to 2022 (statista.com; last accessed November 1, 2023).

[164] Caraway and Ford 2020; Respatiadi 2023, chapters 5 and 6.

administration barely published any implementing regulations, and it was clear that the president was avoiding acting on arguably its core provision – establishing a food super-agency.[165]

There were two apparent sources behind Jokowi's reluctance, although ultimately, each concerned the control of resources. The first involved contrasting policy priorities. The Food Law was bequeathed to Jokowi. He did not pass it, Yudhoyono did. In his first term, Jokowi's priority was augmenting the state sector. Drawing on the China model, he planned to form massive state conglomerates by consolidating existing SOEs into six divisions, one of which was food.[166] These new holding companies would centralize and strengthen presidential control over the trove resources involved, at the expense of regional governments and the private sector.

The second source had to do with the president's desire to not destabilize his own cabinet by antagonizing key political allies in control of those ministries and other agencies that were wary of a new super food body usurping powers and resources. The ministries of Trade, Defense, Social Affairs, Agriculture, Agrarian and Spatial planning, and Fisheries and Maritime Affairs were obvious candidates, as was Bulog. But then the COVID-19 coronavirus began spreading in Indonesia in March and April 2020. Although Jokowi at first denied its existence in the country, growing public fears forced the president's hand.

Controlling the spread of COVID-19 proved an immense challenge. As elsewhere, Indonesia imposed unprecedented lockdowns that halted some of the country's economic and social life. Unemployment rose in response, more severely in denser urban areas than in sparser rural regions. Also, as elsewhere, the Indonesian government spent billions (Rp. 405.1 trillion in 2020, about US$28 billion[167]) on economic recovery packages that included immediate pandemic-related aid to affected groups. Also, as elsewhere, Jokowi's government made avoidable missteps, such as announcing conflicting regulations, delaying or haphazardly enforcing lockdown orders, stifling dissenting opinions, and suppressing pandemic-related data. Aggravating matters was Jokowi's desire to protect his legacy so that the economy could continue to generate the revenue needed to build his pet project – the construction of a new capital city, named Nusantara, in East Kalimantan. Comparing

[165] Interview, Said Abdullah, Director of the People's Coalition for Food Sovereignty, Bogor, July 14, 2016.

[166] Kim 2018. The food holding company became known as ID Food. Its component SOEs were to be transferred to the food trading company, Rajawali Nusantara Indonesia.

[167] Cited in Octania 2021, p. 26.

Table 4.1 *2020 Gross Domestic Product rates.*

	Percentage change
Indonesia	-2.1
Singapore	-5.4
Malaysia	-5.6
Thailand	-6.1
The Philippines	-9.6

Source: data.worldbank.org

2020 economic growth rates in the region evidences that Indonesia's relatively stronger economic performance was tied to Jokowi's reluctance to enforce strict lockdowns, unlike other state leaders (see Table 4.1). One byproduct was the needless and excess deaths of tens of thousands of Indonesians.[168]

In Indonesia and abroad, attention was trained on imperiled food supply lines. There was acute concern about access to food. In Indonesia, the famines that some anticipated did not materialize.[169] International and domestic supply lines were affected, but less comprehensively than some had feared. With favorable weather, paddy harvests held steady, making rice price stabilization manageable, although farming income was hurt by weakened consumer purchasing power, especially among low-income households.[170] But Jokowi was taking few chances and sought solutions to expand domestic food (and especially rice) production, and concomitantly to reduce reliance on food imports. In mid-2020, he announced plans for the construction of even more Outer Island food estates.[171] Criticism of Jokowi's decision to place his controversial Defense Minister, Prabowo, in charge of the new food estate program was less stinging because such decision-making had inured critics by then.

The pandemic exposed coordination weaknesses in food logistics and distribution across government departments, and by mid-2021, Jokowi finally relented to public pressure: He signed the paperwork bringing the long-delayed super agency, known as the National Food Agency, or Badan Pangan Nasional (BPN), into fruition. After seven further months of foot-dragging, Jokowi filled its directorship with Arief Prasetyo Adi, a former director of SOEs in the food sector. Jokowi opted not to name

[168] Jaffrey 2020; Setijadi 2021.
[169] Graham 2020a.
[170] Graham 2020b; Arifin 2023.
[171] "Indonesia's Food Estate Program Eyes New Plantations in Forest Frontiers," news.mongabay.com, October 6, 2020 (last accessed March 19, 2024).

someone from party ranks. Whatever the new director's background, expectations of the BPN's effectiveness were low, which likely suited the interests of Jokowi and his political allies.[172] It was doubtful that the BPN in the remaining 18 months of Jokowi's second and final term could mount meaningful interference. Jokowi passed the BPN headache onto his presidential successor, Prabowo, just as Yudhoyono had passed nuisances stemming from the 2012 Food Law onto him.

Before concluding this chapter, I survey a series of arresting if not peculiar developments that speak to the main themes of this book. First, in a low-key ceremony at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta in August 2022, IRRI's Director-General presented a simple plaque to Jokowi in recognition of Indonesia achieving complete self-sufficiency in rice from 2019–21 (see Figure 4.2). During the pandemic, favorable weather helped to keep the dire predictions of food shortages at bay. Even if rice production across the region was stout during this period, Indonesia's performance appeared impressive. The domestic press celebrated the achievement as a repeat of the glorious history of 36 years past, invoking Soeharto's FAO award for his Green Revolution accomplishment.[173] Yet Soeharto proudly travelled to Rome to receive his accolade; Jokowi did not leave his "office." It was learned that IRRI representatives had only brought to Jakarta a certificate and that the Agriculture Ministry, the proudest of the ministries, hurriedly transformed it into a plaque.[174] Complicating matters were twofold. First, in the post-Green Revolution period, in what some might describe as its neoliberal turn, IRRI, along with the FAO, no longer supports governments reaching complete self-sufficiency in rice if accomplished via costly state-led programs and via high consumer prices that hurt the purchasing power of the poor.[175] And this in large part describes how Indonesia achieved its latest record. The feat also required in 2021 the cancellation by Jokowi of one million tons of rice imports ordered by the Coordinating Economic Ministry and the Trade Ministry.[176]

[172] "Faisal Basri Khawatir Badan Pangan Nasional Hanya Replika Badan Ketahanan Pangan," bisnis.tempo.co, August 26, 2021 (last accessed October 26, 2023). Whether the different entities could be trusted to share key and accurate information was raised.

[173] "Jokowi Repeats Soeharto's Victory: Agriculture Minister," en.tempo.co, August 16, 2022 (last accessed October 30, 2023).

[174] "Terungkap! Plakat Swasembada Beras IRRI untuk Jokowi Dibuat oleh Kementan Kementerian Pertanian," ekonomi.bisnis.com, September 1, 2022 (last accessed October 29, 2023).

[175] For example, see Mohanty (2012).

[176] "Jokowi Cancels Rice Imports, Calls for End to Lingering Arguments," en.tempo.co, March 26, 2001 (last accessed November 11, 2023).

Figure 4.2 Jokowi receiving a plaque from IRRI's Director General, Jean Bailé, at the Presidential Palace for achieving complete self-sufficiency in rice, August 14, 2022.
(Credit/*Indonesian Secretariat Cabinet*)

Second, what sort of record was it? Overlooked in Indonesian media, an IRRI press release noted that the organization considers a country having achieved complete self-sufficiency if it produced enough rice to fulfil within ten percent of consumer demand for three consecutive years.[177] While Indonesia's paddy cultivation surpassed this threshold, during this period the country still continued to import sizable volumes of rice – on average, slightly over 400,000 metric tons per year (at an average cost of US$188 million per year). One could argue that these imports were small enough not to fuss over them. Even so, it calls into question the need for Jokowi's administration to trumpet this production achievement, especially when in the not-so-long-ago past Indonesia had frequently and easily recorded over 90 percent of rice self-sufficiency in consecutive years.

A cause for the unease surrounding the ceremony and the achievement was revealed about a year later as campaigns for the 2024 legislative and

[177] "IRRI Commends Indonesia for Strong Efforts to Achieve Rice Self-Sufficiency," irri.org, August 16, 2022 (last accessed October 29, 2023).

presidential elections gained steam. Jokowi's government announced an importation of roughly two million metric tons of rice, the most in over a decade. With international prices showing upward pressure, and with elections looming, Jokowi must have known that large imports would be forthcoming, with or without that year's El Niño dry-weather phenomenon. By not wanting runaway rice prices to disrupt his 2024 election plans, Jokowi would borrow from the old Philippine playbook of flooding the local market with foreign rice. As importantly, his administration would require extra rice because of its decision to prolong the social welfare rice distribution program for millions of beneficiaries-cum-voters. The program was due to expire in late 2023; however, it was opportunistically extended beyond February 2024, when the elections were scheduled.[178]

If Jokowi had (incidentally) borrowed from the Philippines to flip the script on Indonesian electoral rice import politics, he went a step further. Because of constitutional term limits, he was barred from running for a third term, although some acolytes did speculate on this option, justifying it because of unique postpandemic circumstances. But Jokowi wanted his legacy protected, most notably finishing the construction of Nusantara. This meant he needed a candidate whom he could better control than if that candidate were nominated by his party, PDI-P. This candidate would be susceptible to the competing influence of the party's leader, Megawati. (For ten years Jokowi ran the country, never his party.) Jokowi thereby chose to back Prabowo, his defense minister. Apparently, a decade later, Jokowi, a quintessential post-New Order actor, and Prabowo, a quintessential New Order actor, were no longer the contrasting figures many thought them to be. Leaving nothing to chance, Jokowi forced his eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka – then the mayor of Solo – onto the ticket that would win the 2024 presidential election handily. Not only did these political twists of dubious legality give fresh wind to the dominant narrative of the backsliding of Indonesian democracy over which Jokowi presided,[179] but it was the second stratagem of Jokowi's that, wittingly or unwittingly, had drawn from a familiar Philippine playbook, that of dynastic politics.[180] In Chapter 5, we turn to the Philippines, where a former mayor had more blood on his hands than a former dictator, where that mayor-turned-president shockingly

[178] "Dirut Bulog: Penyaluran Bantuan Beras KPM Pastikan Turunkan Harga," bulog.co.id, September 21, 2023 (last accessed October 29, 2023). Jokowi admitted the difficulty of sourcing this amount internationally, but China offered reassurances. One month later, he visited China on a state visit.

[179] Hadiz 2017; Warburton and Aspinall 2019.

[180] Jokowi's son-in-law is currently mayor of Medan, the largest city off Java.

liberalized the country's rice imports, and where the son of a dictator was trying to recreate the magic of his father's Green Revolution performance.

Conclusion

This chapter showed that Bulog survived the post-Green Revolution period because of Soeharto's unstinting identification with the agency, and it outlasted the 1997/98 AFC because the IMF believed its break-up would extend the country's turmoil, even if the IMF had forced open Indonesia's rice import market. But as Indonesia's multiparty democracy gained momentum, the country's party elite found using Bulog's resources for personal and political gain exceptionally expedient. Consonant with a vested interests argument, senior party figures siphoned funds from the agency to finance their 1999 electoral campaign. That other monies also were illegally drawn, as well as accusations of ministerial corruption regarding rice imports, also provided motivations for and pieces of evidence in impeachment proceedings against Abdurraham Wahid, post-Soeharto Indonesia's second president. As a result, Bulog's scandal-prone ways continued, implicating the country's top politicians.

Bulog-linked scandals and rice politics maintained their high profiles under the presidency of Wahid's successor, President Megawati Soekarnoputeri. Megawati, as Soekarno's daughter, has styled herself as the living legacy of her father and his pro-rice farmer Marhaenism ideology (Chapter 1). Patronage politics at first trumped ideological concerns when she supported the import of considerable amounts of rice by party allies – almost triple the size of Wahid's purchases – as a reward for helping her obtain the presidency. But as elections approached, Megawati reversed course and banned imports to reburnish her nationalist populist credentials. While the nonfunctionalist move hurt Bulog financially, the agency secured alternative economic rents through its domestic trading activities. In collusion with rice traders, it exploited a subsidized rice distribution program to millions of the country's most food-insecure, a plan Bulog was chosen to run because of its nationwide network of offices and warehouses. Neither policy choice, the subsidized rice program or the rice import ban, helped Megawati win reelection; she lost the 2004 race to her former minister, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

Yudhoyono understood the value in both plans and continued with them. With limited quantities of legal rice entering Indonesia, domestic prices rose, as did the country's poverty count, although vocal production nationalists vehemently denied causal connections between the two.

Instead they pointed to the good prices rice farmers were receiving for their bountiful harvests (or at least those with marketable surpluses). Fearful of runaway rice prices, Yudhoyono relented finally and agreed to rice imports. By allowing Bulog to organize the purchases, he placed the agency once again at the heart of the country's rice import regime. These imports and the bulking output for Yudhoyono and Indonesia proved fortuitous, for when the 2008 regional rice crisis emerged, its impact on the country was less muted than it was on regional neighbors, thereby vindicating the rice policies of the production nationalists.

Accordingly, and again aligning with the importance of presidential preference, Yudhoyono minimized rice imports in the run-up to his 2009 reelection bid, by which he avoided being slapped with the tag of anti-peasant. With reelection secured and his campaigning days behind him, the two-term president turned on the rice import faucet, providing us with another case of anti-functionalist imports. Economic rents from the large purchases that rivalled the record amounts of 1998 and 1998 especially benefited the president's coalitional partners and Bulog, at the time headed by a classmate of Yudhoyono. These hefty purchases were made financially affordable by the commodity boom that Indonesia was experiencing, driven by insatiable demand from India and China.

Yudhoyono's successor, Jokowi sought to put an end to the politicized debates surrounding rice imports by recapturing the Green Revolution's magic: He planned to boost national cultivation to levels close to complete self-sufficiency To achieve the ambitious target, Jokowi's government spent lavishly on a dam-building program, among others. When the campaign underwhelmed, Jokowi broke his pledge and imported rice in significant quantities. This helped to change Bulog's fortunes, since the corruption-plagued agency had been bracketed in the management of Jokowi's own set of poverty alleviating subsidized rice programs. Beginning in 2020, the pandemic provided Jokowi with a second impetus to buttress food security by domestic production means. His government securitized food policy by putting the military in charge of building food estates in the country's Outer Islands, a policy program recalling Soeharto's Central Kalimantan catastrophic plan. Here, the military's high visibility has also been reminiscent of the New Order, as has been the raft of recent legislation that has indicated the central government as the undisputed entity responsible for the country's food security. So, while in Jokowi's second term, he grappled with setting up new state agencies to align with the food security objectives of this legislation, few of these changes will mount to altering the deep misgiving of Indonesian policymakers' reliance on the international market, despite the latter's cheaper rice and despite their distortionary policies. Unlike in the cases

of Malaysia (Chapter 3) and the Philippines (Chapter 5), there have been no Indonesian cases of near-miss or of actual trade reform on rice import policy since the IMF's intervention of 1997/98. Here, the protectionist model born out of Green Revolution success endures.

Before turning to this book's final national case study, at this point drawing parallels more conspicuously than we have seen in the political economy of the rice sectors in Indonesia and Malaysia is worthwhile. Despite the differences in population, in levels of development, and in rates of rice self-sufficiency, reasons for the perseverance of the protectionist rice policy models of the two countries have overlapped in considerable fashion.

Both countries have lacked influential domestic coalitions – from pro-urban, food-insecure interests to government technocrats – actively promoting liberalization. Factors why these groups do not cohere into a public force vary and are numerous. In both countries, there has been an abiding sense that rice producers deserve protection from the flooding of the domestic market with cheaper foreign rice. But what has helped shape these deeply held beliefs? In Malaysia, the lasting legacy of Green Revolution success has played a role, but more decisively informing policy has been the acute politicization of ethnicity – a cause *and* effect of government policy writ large. With a predominant Malay producing class, the rice sector's politicization has retained its outlier status compared to other parts of the Malaysian economy. Even with considerable changes in rice policy – privatizing the LPN, reprivatizing Bernas under the corporate control of Syed Mokhtar Albukhary, and Pakatan Harapan's (PH) plan to lift Bernas's import monopoly permit – none resulted in liberalization. Bernas enjoyed the monopoly profits, as has Syed Mokhtar's holdings. PH never vowed liberalization, and once its government was toppled, its policy preference was rendered moot. Malaysian technocrats publicly toe the government's line, whoever happens to be in power.

Likewise in Indonesia, liberalization has not materialized, although, unlike Malaysia, the greatest threat posed was from without – the AFC's program during the 1997/98 AFC that was later rolled back. Here, the lasting legacy of Green Revolution success is profound, but there are other complementary variables. Considerable swaths of Malaysian and Indonesian politicians favor state intervention in part because they sincerely believe that is what the public prefers, in part because with pride they believe their policies have been proven effective. In Indonesia, this sentiment emerges from a nationalist agrarian history that foregrounds the *petani* in defending the sovereignty and independence of the country, a potent legacy of the countryside that crucially Soeharto furthered with

Green Revolution success. In Malaysia, at the forefront, is the sensitivity of ethnicity and a near hegemonic belief that the state is the proper entity to nurture and protect the Malay producing class. While it is true that PH followed through on its campaign pledge to revoke Bernas's import monopoly, it also committed itself, if not awkwardly, to production nationalism by vowing higher self-sufficiency rates; nor did it promise deregulation. In Indonesia, no presidents or parties dare pledge liberalizing the trade or revoking Bulog's import monopoly. Indonesian and Malaysian technocrats may hold private views on the positive effects of liberalization, but they tend not to publicly express them through editorials (as they do in the Philippines, Chapter 5).

In both cases, agricultural political economy lends weight to the prolonging of protectionism. Malaysia's case is the clearest through the manipulation of electoral rules that give disproportionate weight to rural Malay voters. In Indonesia, the demographic heft of smallholders in Java's heartlands simply makes them a sought-after target of party elites that leads to a modicum of resource distribution.

Resource distribution has also kept the two rice agencies, Bernas and Bulog, at the center of nonfunctional, patronage-driven, capital-accumulating rice import regimes. In Malaysia, economic rents were concentrated in UMNO hands and then concentrated further still in those of Syed Mokhtar Albukhary's holdings. Under both arrangements, profits from rice trading for private entities trumped public interests of lowering rice prices for society's neediest. In Indonesia, the concentration of rent-seeking transformed in the opposite direction. It was controlled from the top under Soeharto's direction into the hands of close cronies and family members, but then was loosened by powerful party elites in democratic Indonesia, who used the resulting proceeds to fund expensive campaigns. Monopolistic control of rice imports prevails in both cases, as does the continuation of state-led paddy production campaigns, a staple of the Green Revolution approach and success.

5 The Philippines
Breaking the Model

> "It's a free market now for rice."
> Duterte Presidential Spokesperson, October 2018.

This chapter recounts how the Philippines went from being a temporary rice exporter under President Marcos, a quintessential production nationalist, to being the first among the net importers to open up its rice import trade, starting in 2019. It follows the unrelenting scandals and controversies surrounding the country's rice import regime in narrative style, and concludes with a discussion of President Duterte's (partial) liberalization using comparative historical analysis.

As in Malaysia and Indonesia, proud production nationalists continued to have robust influence in the post-Green Revolution period, with paddy growing campaigns featuring regularly under post-Marcos presidencies (to the dismay of the World Bank). At the same time, as in Indonesia, rice import volumes fluctuated sharply in a decidedly non-functional fashion. Quantities soared for political purposes, aided by the massaging of key data to justify the excessive purchases. But without strong parties, as in Indonesia, or without acute ethnic fragmentation pervading rice policymaking, as in Malaysia, personal or individuated patronage relations in the Philippines have had more influence in shaping patterns of resource distribution. As in Indonesia, import volumes in the Philippines have also been curbed with intent, less so to burnish one's agrarian nationalist credentials, but to distinguish one's administration (Benigno Aquino III) from the intolerably corrupt use of rice imports of a preceding presidency (Macapagal-Arroyo). Almost predictably, in all three cases, the suppression of imports led to an increase in rice smuggling.

But unlike Bulog in Indonesia and Bernas in Malaysia, the NFA eventually was stripped of its monopoly import permit. Bernas survived a serious electoral challenge to its license, and Bulog regained its permit after losing it to IMF restructuring and looks likely to secure it for the foreseeable future. In the Philippines, external IFI pressure has pervaded

the entirety of the post-Green Revolution period more so than in Indonesia or Malaysia, both exerting its influence before and after the Philippines joined the WTO in 1995. This in part accounts for why the Philippines, unlike Indonesia and Malaysia, agreed to a convoluted quantitative restrictions arrangement governing its rice imports. As a result, arguably, the Philippines experienced more "near miss" reform attempts than Malaysia did. Even so, President Duterte's 2018 decision that finally upended the decades-long institutionalization of Green Revolution protectionism was shocking. Duterte did not campaign on the issue, and his decision even took the country's fairly influential market economists who had long championed the policy change by surprise. Spooked by a bout of inflation, members of Duterte's economic team convinced their boss to take the decision also to save their economic reform program. Even if retail rice prices subsequently declined as predicted, the dip was shallower than anticipated, giving grist to the country's fervent anti-liberalization, pro-farmer advocates, especially since farmgate prices plummeted. But with the marketization card already played, Duterte's successor, the eldest son of Ferdinand Marcos, has had fewer policy options at his disposal to overcome the inflationary food pressures that have similarly hounded Indonesia and Malaysia. President Marcos Jr. would prefer to follow his father's footsteps and recast a heroic Green Revolution-like productivity boost. But, for good or for ill, the conditions that he faces today differ fundamentally from those his father navigated decades ago. As for today and the future, it is looking increasingly likely that neither of Marcos Jr.'s two prominent campaign pledges that work at cross-purposes, repeal of rice import liberalization and retailing rice for Ph20 per kilogram, will come to fruition.

Agriculture Under Corazon Aquino

When in 1986, as we saw in Chapter 2, President Marcos was forced into exile, the country's farmers were producing enough paddy that tons of it were left to rot in state warehouses. By 1995, urban consumers were lining up for hours to purchase rationed amounts of rice.[1] What led a former excess producer to experience the country's worst supply shortage in nearly three decades?

One proposition maintained that underinvestment caused by misguided policymaking had bedeviled paddy production. But the argument came in two varieties. Focusing on exogenous factors, Bello underscored

[1] "Broken Rice Bowl," *Asiaweek*, September 1, 1995, p. 31.

that the structural adjustment policies imposed by the IMF and the World Bank following Marcos's ouster placed an enormous debt servicing burden on the government's budget. This, combined with a fiscal austerity program that was agreed to by President Corazon Aquino, Marcos's successor, led to massive underinvestment, resulting in the economy's deindustrialization.[2] Agricultural spending, meanwhile, was cut by "more than half, from 7.5 percent of total government spending in 1982 under Marcos to 3.3 percent in 1988 under Aquino." Diminished state spending meant that the "amount of cultivated land covered by irrigation stagnated … Crop yields sagged across the board … ."[3]

Market economists instead emphasized domestic policies for the underinvestment – from an overvalued currency that penalized export-oriented agriculture and favored such import-substitution commodities as rice to a bulking NFA that crowded out private sector participation. Moreover, by spending its scarce resources on rice price stabilization, the NFA privileged consumers rather than propping up paddy prices, benefiting producers.[4] Still others blamed the rice supply woes on the adverse impact of the country's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) that was passed into law in 1988 under Aquino. Senator John Osmeña, grandson of the former president and a guardian of the landlord class, insisted that the uncertainties caused by CARP were discouraging investment, as larger farmers were unsure how much land would be surrendered and when.[5] Osmeña failed to mention that landlord resistance to CARP contributed to the program's dodgy implementation.

Osmeña's complaints were exposing a larger debate on land reform. Aquino's candidacy had received support from moderate democratic and leftist civil society activists; for decades, both had been promoting agrarian reform as a means to reduce the country's gaping inequality and to weaken the grip the landowning class had on the countryside.[6] Even some members of the conservative capitalist class agreed that instituting reform at this historical juncture was an appropriate response in delivering rural justice and healing the wounds Philippine society had suffered under the Marcos dictatorship.[7] Although there was seemingly a national consensus over the need for land reform, contestation over

[2] Bello 2009, p. 57. [3] Ibid., p. 60.
[4] Balisacan, Clarete, and Cortez 1992; subsequently, see David (2003).
[5] "Cory Allays Fears of Rice Shortage, Will Retain NFA," *Malaya*, April 4, 1989.
[6] The Communist Party of the Philippines and its aboveground National Democratic Front boycotted the 1986 elections.
[7] Interview, Senen Bacani, Manila, September 22, 2014. Bacani served as Corazon Aquino's third agricultural secretary. See also Riedinger (1995, pp. 107, 119).

CARP's specific provisions was acute.[8] Aquino, after all, was a member of this landowning class with her family holdings in the province of Tarlac of Central Luzon. And the Catholic Church, itself a large landowning institution, had lent Aquino critical political capital and moral support in the face of the many coups she faced. Lastly, Congress's powerful landowner bloc guarded against the insertion of what it saw as radical proposals into CARP. In the end, according to a leading observer of Philippine agriculture, the resulting act reflected "the actual balance of power between pro-reform and anti-reform forces within and outside the … state: It was not revolutionary, but neither was it a blatantly conservative piece of legislation."[9] For example, while the law formally covered a much higher percentage of agricultural land than its predecessors, it contained enough loopholes to exclude plantation interests.

Returning to the causes of the 1995 domestic rice crisis, some empirics challenged the underinvestment argument. Consider the CARP variant of the argument. Earlier research had shown there was little correlation between tenure status (owner-cultivators versus lessees versus share tenants) and rice productivity.[10] Moreover, even as public expenditure in the agricultural sector continued to fall under Aquino's successor, former general Fidel Ramos, rice output climbed steadily. From 1987 to 1994, it expanded nearly 4 percent per annum, or about 5.55 million to 6.85 million metric tons.[11] And the self-sufficiency level during this period, on average, hovered in the upper 90th percentile. In fact, aided by good weather, no official imports were recorded in 1991 and 1992. In short, sectoral shortcomings did not portend the imminence of a severe shortage. It is then more apt to view the 1995 supply woes as a provisioning crisis rather than one of production. Behind the provisioning problems stood a volatile mix of political and institutional factors.

A Provisioning Crisis

A dry spell in the main rice-growing areas of Central Luzon and Cagayan precipitated a minor supply shortage. When, by mid-1995, it became apparent that neither imports nor government reserves would be injected into the market in adequate volume, retail prices doubled by October. The Inter-Agency Committee on Rice and Corn (IACRC) claimed that

[8] Land reform pertains to redistribution, as does agrarian reform, but the latter also advocates for a range of supporting policies, like services extension training to ensure farmer prosperity.

[9] Borras 2007, p. 106. [10] Mangahas, Miralao, and de los Reyes 1976, pp. 7, 86–87.

[11] Balisacan and Ravago 2003, p. 10, table 2.

in late 1994 it had forecast a shortfall and called for a half million tons of rice to be imported in time for the country's traditional lean season, which roughly begins in July.[12]

The recommendation seemingly went unheeded because the state machinery was preoccupied with politicking for the May 1995 mid-term elections. At stake was half the Senate and all 204 seats of the House of Representatives (and over 17,000 local-level positions). Some speculated that imports were delayed with the intent to create a rice crisis in order to electorally harm President Ramos and his Lakas-Laban coalition at the polls.[13] Ramos sought a decisive Senate majority to finish the passing of his legislative agenda of opening up the country's protectionist economy.[14] If this were the case, the ploy failed: Ramos's coalition captured nine of the twelve contested Senate seats and nearly all of the House seats in the May contests. And rice prices had held steady until June.

Others blamed the NFA. There was a trace of irony behind charging the NFA with under-importing; typically, it was assailed for over-importing to seize economic rents. A pro-farmer group reported that the NFA in 1993 had made about PhP600 million from 200,000 metric tons of rice imports. Interestingly, the NFA did not deny the charge but claimed to have invested the excess revenue in postharvesting facilities.[15] In moves toward liberalizing the agricultural sector as pushed by the World Bank and IMF, in 1986 Aquino's government had stripped the NFA of regulatory control over a profitable wheat import business, and three years later the agency lost its dominion over corn imports. As a result, agency officials began squeezing rice importing harder to pay for domestic operations and to provide patronage for its management and leading politicians. A former NFA head from the 1990s attested to this development.[16]

As for the 1995 debacle, the NFA pointed out that a regular shipment of imported rice had arrived in July.[17] However, the amount was below IACRC recommendations and failed in preventing the rise in retail prices. Why then did the NFA not initiate emergency proceedings to bring in additional imports? According to the then NFA Administrator, Romeo David, his agency's hands were tied by institutional and political

[12] "NFA: Mission Unaccomplished," *Malaya*, January 17, 1986.
[13] Ibid. Lakas: The President's People Power Group. It was allied with the National Union of Christian Democrats. Laban: The Struggle of Democratic Filipinos (Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino).
[14] Hernandez 1996.
[15] "Bureaucratic Blunder or Necessary Evil?" *Business Daily*, August 2, 1995.
[16] Interview, Romeo David, Manila, July 24, 2014.
[17] "NFA: Mission Unaccomplished," *Malaya*, January 17, 1986.

matters. The head of the NFA Council, the NFA's chief policymaking board, David noted, was led by the Agriculture Secretary, Roberto Sebastian. (Institutionally, in 1987, the NFA was transferred from the Office of the Presidency [OOP] to the Agriculture Department [DA] to help prevent the repeat of executive abuses of the agency of the late Marcos period, as covered in Chapter 2.)[18] Sebastian, David averred, refused to declare a state of shortage, a necessary step in authorizing the NFA to purchase emergency imports. Since the DA was responsible for production, its secretary, David also alleged, was reluctant to admit to such failures.[19] Throughout the first half of 1995, perhaps with an eye toward the mid-term elections, ever the production nationalist, Sebastian stubbornly contended that the country's rice situation was under control. The arrival of imports in November finally brought down prices, and the crisis abated.[20]

The NFA may have dodged the bullet on the import mishap, but fending off the cascades of criticism over its procurement and stockpiling policies was a trickier endeavor. The precipitous drop in the agency's procurement rates and reserve levels handcuffed its ability to respond with adequate market interjections of domestic rice during the crisis's build-up. In 1990, the agency had procured 6.1 percent of national paddy output; by 1993, it dipped to 1.6 percent and further to an unfathomable 0.1 percent in 1995.[21] With less grain procured, a likewise decline in NFA inventory was inevitable. From an equivalent of 36 days of national rice consumption in 1992, it fell to 18 days in 1993, before bottoming out at one and a half days in 1995.[22] (NFA reserves then accounted for about one third of the national stockpile, with households and commercial enterprises holding the remainder.)

The NFA expectedly defended itself against accusations of incompetence. Echoing Bello's argument above, it maintained that the decline in these figures was the result of IMF-led institutional reforms of the immediate post-Marcos period. As it would do in Indonesia a decade hence (Chapter 4), the IMF had sought to root out cost "inefficiencies" that plagued the sector through liberalization and deregulation, which featured substituting NFA's activities with that of the private

[18] The IACRC submits its recommendation to the DA, which may pass it onto the NFA Council (Tolentino and de la Peña, 2011, p. 165).
[19] "A Balancing Act for the NFA," *Business Daily*, August 3, 1995.
[20] "NFA: Mission Unaccomplished," *Malaya*, January 17, 1986. According to research, import arrivals have greater impact on prices than do NFA market releases (Balisacan, Clarete, and Cortez 1992, p. V–16).
[21] Tolentino and de la Peña 2011, p. 164, table 7.1.
[22] "NFA: Mission Unaccomplished," *Malaya*, January 17, 1986.

sector.[23] David also stressed that a leaner NFA comported with the WTO Agreement on Agriculture guidelines, which the Senate had ratified during the same year of the crisis.[24]

Neither pro-farmer groups nor economists accepted the NFA's reasoning. The Philippine Peasant Institute (PPI) accused the agency of prioritizing rent-seeking and colluding with the country's rice cartel over providing just prices for producers. PPI pointed to a memorandum of understanding signed between the NFA and the Philippine Confederation of Grain Associations, known as Confed, where the former profits by selling licenses to members of the latter to participate in the postharvesting marketing system, including dealing, distributing, hauling, and the like.[25] Although Confed had more than 28,000 members across the islands, accusations focused on its close ties to the so-called Binondo Cartel, or Big Seven. For decades, it had been accused of dominating the trade and manipulating prices.[26] According to a 1990 PPI study, Confed controlled some 40 percent of the rice trade, and its control had risen steadily since.[27] The core accusation centered on the notion that when the supply shortage was worsening, the NFA was unable to control its domestic marketing partners, who exploited the situation and hoarded paddy to drive prices artificially higher. This explains why the raids ordered by the Ramos government on warehouses failed: NFA officials had fed authorities misinformation or forewarned certain traders to move supplies. Allegations were further made that the imports that had arrived in July 1995 were unable to contain prices, not because of their low volume, but because the cartel, with the NFA's complicity, bought the purchases in their entirety to keep them off the market.[28]

Economists also took the NFA to task for its role in the 1995 crisis in particular and in the country's food insecurity in general. The NFA, they complained, was implementing short-sighted, pro-urban policies, where attention and resources favored retail price stabilization because of exaggerated concerns over urban unrest. That 80 percent of NFA subsidies was spent on stabilization was emblematic of this bias. Low farmgate prices suppressed the cultivators' incentives, whereas higher and

[23] This policy change pertained more to NFA domestic activities than imports.
[24] "NFA's Formula for Crisis: Allow Cartel to Dictate Prices," *The Manila Chronicle*, September 11, 1995.
[25] Confed is also referred to Philcongrains or Confed Grains.
[26] "Modus Operandi of Rice Cartel Bared," *Business Daily*, August, 29, 1995.
[27] Ibid.; "NFA Accused of Coddling Rice Cartel," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 10, 1983.
[28] "Caught in a Web of Graft, NFA Can't Solve the Rice Crisis," *The Manila Chronicle*, September 9, 1995.

especially more stable prices would push them to plant more, which in turn would reduce retail prices. All told, according to this view, the NFA was a loss-making venture with little capacity to effectively stabilize retail *and* farmgate prices.[29] Aware that the NFA's abolishment would cause undesirable short-term disruption, they proposed splitting the NFA into two entities. As a regulatory authority, it would oversee buffer stockpiling, especially for emergency purposes. Second, as a grains trading corporation, it would compete with the private sector on a level playing field.[30] (On this wish, more or less coming true some 25 years later, see below.)

Aftermath and a New Kind of Crisis

Along with the NFA, the Ramos presidency disagreed with these economists' evaluations and policy prescriptions. It seemed to take away two lessons from the 1995 debacle. First, a handcuffed NFA posed a threat to national food security; and second, a rice crisis made for bad politics, as Ramos's approval ratings had plunged as a result.[31] So, in 1996, the government nearly doubled the NFA's credit ceiling to PhP10 billion to bolster its purchasing power. (The NFA was not granted all its requests on its postcrisis wish list, such as eliminating congressional oversight of its budget and receiving automatic appropriations.[32])

The main institutional tweak that the NFA would undergo was one that neither economists nor the Ramos administration recommended nor foresaw. It occurred instead under the watch of Ramos's vice-president and successor, Joseph Estrada. A former movie star and mayor of one of Metro Manila's municipal cities, the populist Estrada won the 1997 presidential contest by a record margin. The middle class, however, was dismissive of his populist pretenses and his administration's corruption, which quickly enveloped the rice import business. Upon assuming the presidency, Estrada administratively returned the NFA to the OOP. The move appealed to the NFA, freeing it from intervention by the DA. At the time, the institutional reordering seemed innocuous and went mostly overlooked. This was understandable considering the other scandals that were engulfing Estrada's presidency. The OOP had justified the maneuver as an attempt to improve "operational efficiency." As one

[29] Balisacan, Clarete, and Cortez 1992, p. ES-2.
[30] "The NFA Must Play Dual Role to Avert Crisis: PAEDA," *Business Daily*, January 11, 1996; Balisacan, Clarete, and Cortez 1992, chapter 9.
[31] Magno 1996.
[32] "Palace Oks P10B 'Ceiling' for NFA," *Business Daily*, January 23, 1996; "NFA seeks drastic powers on rice import, contracts," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 3, 1995.

critical report wirily noted: "Nobody at that time understood what the term meant, but the reasons are becoming clearer."[33]

One "reason" was the rise in rice imports, climbing nearly 90 percent from 1997 to 1998. At 2.15 million metric tons, this then record volume may have been used to substitute for the poor harvest owing to dry conditions related to the El-Niño weather phenomenon. Yet the Ramos administration had imported 1.9 million metric tons for this purpose. When the Estrada government ordered an extra quarter-million metric tons, a second "reason" was gaining in focus – the excessive volume was tied to soaring commissions on the purchases. With the NFA now under the OOP, the latter took it upon itself to make direct orders. This rendered public bidding by the NFA superfluous. As a result, brokering fees rocketed. Since Estrada's government favored a Hong Kong-based supplier, purchase costs were inflated as this middleman procured supplies from elsewhere. It was learned that the 800,00 metric tons (delivered between January and May 1999) featured a commission of US$42 per ton. Of the nearly US$34 million in rents generated, reportedly about two-thirds were distributed to Estrada confidants, with the remainder divided among NFA leadership. Given the record-setting imports of 1998, the need for the 1999 purchase – ordered before a full accounting of government stocks was completed – was doubtful.[34]

The country's weak party system mitigated against Estrada having to distribute ill-gotten gains via rice imports among party elites, as happened in post-Soeharto Indonesia (Chapter 4) This inchoate party system in part stems in the main from electoral rules predicated on the post-Marcos constitution, including a single term-limit for the presidency. While this prohibition on reelection is aimed to prevent any political leader bringing back dictatorship, it also discourages presidents from building a strong party that could function as a reelection vehicle. Furthermore, disincentives to party-build result from the separate ballots upon which presidential and vice-presidential candidates must run and from the nationwide delineation of Senate constituencies, which contributes to partisan infighting.[35] Meanwhile, unlike in Malaysia (Chapter 3), Estrada did not come under pressure to divert such rice rents to a key ethnic bloc. Unfortunately for Filipinos, the graft surrounding rice imports would only worsen under Estrada's own vice-president and

[33] "Ombudsman Opens Rice Probe on NFA Rice Importations," *Philippine Star*, March 23, 1999.
[34] Ibid.; "Price of NFA Rice Imports Too High?" *Philippine Star*, March 24, 1999; Intal and Garcia 2005, p. 21.
[35] Hicken 2015.

successor, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Unfortunately for the region, her rapacious rent-seeking behavior would have wider and more dire implications.

Arroyo as Unelected President

Late in Corazon Aquino's presidency, her heavily indebted government began discussions with the ADB on a loan program to liberalize the country's agricultural sector. But Aquino's term expired in 1992 before the two sides could finalize terms. Succeeding Aquino, Ramos also focused on opening up the economy and found success in the energy and telecommunication sectors.[36] The 1995 crisis had made sure that the rice sector would avoid liberalization.

Ramos did not ignore agriculture altogether. Under his leadership, Congress passed the Agricultural Tariffication Act (Republic Act or RA 8178), which eliminated quantitative restrictions (QR) on all agricultural imports – except rice. RA 8178, moreover, chipped away at the NFA's monopoly by permitting private sector rice imports. That the law left the scope of private participation in the main to NFA discretion disappointed market reformers.[37]

The special treatment rice imports received under RA 8178 had been prefigured by negotiations on the country's 1994 entry into the WTO. (In 1995, the Philippine Senate ratified the Uruguay Round of the GATT.) Country negotiators had requested a 10-year exemption from a more open system of tariffs on rice imports. This request was permitted under Annex 5 of the GATT Agreement on Agriculture for highly sensitive commodities. Negotiators requested more time for farmers to enhance their competitiveness in order to protect their incomes once cheaper foreign rice inundated the country. In return for its agreement, the WTO, in part undermining the exemption, imposed a minimum annual volume (MAV) of rice imports equal to one percent of national consumption. The initial amount was 59,000 metric tons and was expected to increase over time to 4 percent. Ramos's administration also agreed to a tariff of 50 percent for amounts under the MAV (in-tariff) and 100 percent for amounts over it (out-tariff); these percentages were expected to decrease over time.[38] A provision in RA 8178 granted the

[36] Privatizing some SOEs and other policy changes were among the reforms (Salazar 2007; Rood 2019, pp. 116–19).
[37] Tolentino and de la Peña 2011, pp. 165–66.
[38] Intal and Garcia 2005, p. 9. Then only South Korea and Japan also regulated rice imports predicated on a QR system.

president authority to waive these tariffs, which Ramos and Estrada used with regularity.

Ten years after initial negotiations on the revitalization and reform program, in 2002, the ABD had finally agreed to terms with the Estrada government. The US$175 million Grains Sector Development Program (GSDP) was divided into two. The first US$75 million loan was intended to finance improvements in irrigation and in crop production technologies. The second loan of US$100 million would support the policy planning behind privatizing the rice sector. Unlike the first technical or "apolitical" loan, this larger loan was "contingent on policy and institutional reforms aimed at expanding private sector participation in rice marketing and improving the efficiency of the NFA … ."[39]

Alongside powerful donors and multilateral organizations such as the ADB, the World Bank, the IMF, as well as the US, a small but vocal group of Filipino economists avidly supported eliminating the NFA's import monopoly in general and implementing the second GSDP loan in particular. Many of these market advocates have been affiliated with the economic and business schools at the University of the Philippines-Diliman; they also have held stints in government, including at the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and at the think-tank, the Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS).[40] Often writing in editorials, these technocrats argued that not only would the cash-strapped government receive a revenue boost from the tariffs applied to rice imports paid by private actors, but increased imports also would drive down domestic rice prices. As such, they would benefit the urban and rural poor alike, since significant portions of the latter were net rice buyers.

They have been opposed by the country's vocal pro-petty producer advocates, who maintain that, unable to compete with cheap imports from mainland Southeast Asia, small-scale cultivators will face despair and bankruptcy under marketization; forced sales of their lands would be an inevitability. And as these plots are converted to gated subdivisions, golf courses, and tourist resorts, or at best planted with exotic export-oriented cash crops, the country's food security, let alone its food sovereignty, will be exposed. Further jeopardized will be the livelihoods of millions more landless farm laborers, now jobless and less capable of feeding their families. In short, food-sovereignty activists insisted that privatization would portend rural instability.

[39] Tolentino 2002, p. 34.
[40] On the background of technocracy in the Philippines, see Tadem (2020).

Joining these civil society advocates in opposing rice import liberalization have been large sections of the agricultural bureaucracy. These production nationalists played key roles in implementing the Green Revolution policies under Marcos that led to the production spikes. While they acknowledged NFA's corruption, they were proud of their past achievements. In particular, they stressed that the Philippines was home to IRRI, where scores of agronomists and agricultural economists from around Asia had trained, many of whom participated in Green Revolution successes in their home countries.[41] And even when those who supported liberalization were asked for reasons why protectionism and rice boosterism had become cornerstone policies in multiple governments, each mentioned pride as a contributing factor.[42]

Conventional wisdom held that Estrada's populist administration would side with the activists and prideful production nationalists. Yet it did pursue some market-oriented reforms.[43] Illustratively, Estrada's Agriculture Secretary Edgardo Angara, in collaboration with the NEDA Secretary General Felipe Medalla, Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno, and Executive Secretary Ronaldo Zamora, strove to enact the GSDP's second phase that would open up rice imports. Beyond the general reasons surveyed above, they reasoned that appeasing the IMF would help in easing the government's debt burden and budget deficits.[44] To the relief of the NFA and its web of supporters, including the Confederation of Grain Retailers Associations (Grecon), whose 50,000 members sold almost exclusively subsidized NFA rice, politics overwhelmed these plans.[45]

In early 2001, days of large middle-class protests backed by the military, national police, and Catholic Church helped to topple Estrada, who was accused of grand corruption and other derelictions of duty. As a result, his vice-president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, was elevated to the presidency.[46]

[41] Interviews, Benito Vergara, retired IRRI scientist, Los Banos, November 19, 2013; Eufemio T. Rasco, Jr, PhilRice Executive Director, Manila, June 2, 2014; Senen Reyes, former NFA official, Manila, July 16, 2015.

[42] Interviews, Mahar Mangahas, former agricultural economist and head of the Social Weather Station, Manila, July 8, 2014; Ponce S. Intal, economist at Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, Jakarta, July 13, 2016; Bruce Tolentino, former IRRI official and Central Bank adviser, Manila, September 18, 2019.

[43] Castro 2007. [44] Intal and Garcia 2005.

[45] Interview, Jaime Magbunua, President of Grecon, Manila, July 14, 2015. Grecon's membership peaked at over 80,000, but under Arroyo it fell to about 25,000. Grecon has slightly altered its name, but its better-known abbreviation remains.

[46] Estrada was never formally impeached as partisan bickering halted the Senate trial.

Arroyo appeared to be committed to liberalization. With a doctorate in economics, she professed technocratic tendencies. Almost 20 years before Pakatan Harapan's pledge in Malaysia, in her first SONA of 2001, Arroyo promised, "to remove the monopoly of the NFA in importation."[47] She then named a trade lawyer with experience working with the WTO, Anthony Abad, to lead the NFA. Abad claims to have been assured of the political support necessary to enact reforms at the notoriously corrupt agency.[48]

Arroyo, however, sent mixed signals on rice sector reform, embodied by her appointment of Leonardo Montemayor as agriculture secretary. Montemayor was elected to Congress via the party-list system, representing the farmers' sector. While he was stalling reforms,[49] Abad was facing formidable obstacles at the NFA. Unprepared for the challenges that reform posed, he maintains to have never felt in charge of the agency, despite being its administrator. He was awed by the intransigence of the NFA's seasoned managers and deputy managers, highlighted by their close relations with grains traders who milled about the agency's offices. That concrete policy direction was not provided by Arroyo's advisers, he recalls, left him feeling rudderless.[50]

Arroyo had been charting her own course, informed by her unusual position of being an incumbent who was seeking election. In the Philippine context, much like elsewhere, winning a presidential election might require: 1) showing the electorate that one's policies produced results, 2) gaining support from key congressional allies, and 3) distributing patronage to influential local officials and supporters nationwide. I address each component in turn.

On public policy, Arroyo introduced what many Filipino voters, on account of Green Revolution success, have come to expect of their presidents – enact a specialized project of rice production. In late 2001, she launched a hybrid rice seed commercialization program. Prior to the May 2004 election, her administration proclaimed that the coverage of plots using hybrid rice had expanded exponentially from 6000 hectares at the program's start to nearly 100,000 hectares.[51] The World Bank viewed it differently. A review described Arroyo's program as a waste of resources with distortionary effects on the sector and on society. Coverage was well below targets, the hybrid seeds were produced and

[47] SONA 2001. [48] Interview, Anthony Abad, Manila, September 21, 2018.
[49] Tolentino 2002, p. 39. On his anti-liberalization stance, see Montemayor (2009).
[50] See note 48.
[51] "Farmers Double Palay Harvest Using Hybrid Rice," *Manila Times*, February 16, 2004 (asiarice.org; last accessed November 6, 2023).

distributed by a state agency rather than the private sector, the program prioritized paddy over other higher-value crops, and since the hybrid seeds were disproportionately captured by larger farmers, inequality among rice producers widened. Lastly, because Arroyo's project failed to increase national output meaningfully due to the technology's limited coverage, rice prices remained elevated, thereby continuing to punish food-insecure Filipinos.[52]

So why did the president renege on her promise of her first SONA to liberalize rice imports? Apparently, eliminating the monopoly was not so simple. Doing so would have demanded sturdy congressional support to pass the necessary reform legislation, as amending both the NFA's 1972 founding charter (Presidential Directive No. 4) and RA 8178 were required. At the time, Arroyo had insufficient political capital to pull off this legislative feat, even if she had so desired.

As an unelected president, Arroyo was in a weak position to pass such controversial legislation through Congress, and her ardent promotion of it might have risked alienating key congressional allies, which is our second aspect on winning the presidency as noted above. Rice marketization was unpopular in both chambers, particularly in the lower House of Representatives. Many of its members represented rice farming constituencies. These representatives enjoyed NFA-related patronage, including direct cash payments and access to subsidized rice that was channeled through governors, mayors, and even church groups, as well as marketing licenses to local powerbrokers. It is part and parcel of a broader yet localized patronage and vote-buying system.[53] With reform efforts not forthcoming, by late 2003, Arroyo's government cancelled the controversial GSDP loan. Around that time, Abad had resigned from the NFA. His replacement, the Arroyo protégé Arthur Yap, denounced liberalization because private investors "never put up a support price or release rice in times of emergency."[54]

Third, on distributing patronage extensively to secure a national election, Arroyo deployed the DA, led by Secretary Luis Lorenzo Jr. He spearheaded what became known as the fertilizer (fund) scam. In this scam, some PhP728 million (approximately US$13.2 million) intended for fertilizer purchases was distributed unlawfully to local officials and other private actors to buy votes. (It was part of a larger PhP2.8 billion

[52] World Bank 2007, esp. p. 22, table 16; see also Cororaton and Corong (2009).
[53] "Privatize the NFA," manilatimes.net, December 14, 2005 (last accessed November 6, 2023); Fang 2015, chapter 4; more generally, Aspinall, Weiss, Hicken, *et al.* 2022, chapter 3.
[54] "Rice in Every Plate," *Starweek Magazine*, asiarice.org, February 1, 2004 (last accessed November 6, 2023).

slush fund to "aid" local government units.[55]) After Arroyo dubiously won the 2004 election – there were well-founded accusations of widespread vote rigging, especially on the southern island of Mindanao – Lorenzo resigned from his post under a cloud of corruption allegations. Years later, corruption charges were filed against two former governors, two former mayors, and twenty other officials, as well as private individuals, in connection with the fertilizer scam.[56]

Prior to the 2004 elections, Arroyo did partially privatize rice imports, predicated on RA 8178. Her novel program allowed farmer groups to import rice via the NFA to raise their capital accumulation and revenue. The NFA also began tendering import licenses for private traders. In the end, both programs had muted impact. NFA's allocations remained small, and accusations of fixed bidding for favored groups were widespread.[57] And because farmer groups lacked the capital to import rice, they were used as dummy cooperatives by private traders. After Yap admitted to the program's exploitation, the government shut it down in 2003.[58]

Arroyo as Elected President

During Arroyo's presidency, the spotlight was placed on the other mechanism, apart from official imports, through which foreign rice was regularly brought to the islands. With porous borders, a weak bureaucracy, and a protected economy that drives a wedge between foreign and domestic prices, rice smuggling, along with other goods, has been a perennial problem in the Philippines, not unlike in Indonesia and even in Malaysia.[59] But after the GATT-WTO granted the Philippines its own schedule of rice trade liberalization in the mid-1990s, smuggling arguably worsened because traders with greater accuracy could predetermine the level of official imports and thus make purchases accordingly. A news report sketched the dynamics with flair:

[55] On Arroyo "amassing patronage from public and private sources, recentralizing clientelist networks and directing funds to regions seen favorable to her," see Thompson (2010 p. 12).

[56] "2 Ex-Governors, 2 Ex-Mayors Charged in Fertilizer Scam," philstar.com, September 10, 2015 (last accessed November 6, 2023).

[57] Acebedo 2006, pp. 16–20, esp. p. 20; Interview, Romeo David, former NFA Administrator, Manila, July 24, 2014.

[58] "GMA's 'Farmers as Importers Program' Spells Doom for Rice Agriculture," bulatlat.com, February 9–15, 2003 (last accessed November 6, 2023).

[59] "Rice Importer Faces Penalty," *The Tribune*, December 10, 1935; Hartendorp 1961, pp. 273–77.

When our government announces the rice import quota… [it] is not new to veteran rice traders … . They can guess rightly (and accurately) RP's [Republic of the Philippines] rice import range of 800,000 to 1M [million] metric tons … . Rice smugglers/traders are faster than our bureaucrats in contacting and paying exporters in dollars. They can also buy cheap with ready cold cash. RP rice traders are a dime a dozen in Hanoi … and Ho Chi Minh … . If the official price is $185 per metric ton, rice smugglers can pay cash probably 30 percent less. That's the reason rice smugglers are never caught even if the evidence is one big boat loaded with rice. There are various ports … where contraband articles and commodities can be unloaded without getting caught. The message is, 'spread the sunshine'.[60]

The smuggling was predicted to worsen. As the ten-year WTO exemption approached, in 2005, the Philippines agreed to increase its MAV to 350,000 metric tons (from about 240,000) per annum in exchange for a 7-year waiver. Yet remarkably, by most accounts, smuggling subsided on account of a new specialized anti-smuggling body set up under Arroyo's government. Cooperation between it and the Bureau of Customs (BOC), whose reputation for corruption rivalled that of the NFA, was unusually effective. One report indicated that this partnership helped to shave off as much as a billion US dollars in value of smuggled commodities, including that of rice.[61]

Suppressing smuggled rice squeezes supply, however. This in turn places upward pressure on rice prices – an anathema to sitting presidents in the Philippines and elsewhere. To replace the deficit in supply, Arroyo deployed another well-trodden trick of the trade, as covered in previous chapters – that of over-importing. According to official data from 2002–04 to 2005–07, the country's three-year annual average of rice imports rose by 70 percent (from 1.03 million metric tons to 1.75 million).[62] It was also during this time when the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) unexpectedly raised the official estimate of per capita consumption of rice for Filipinos on an annual basis from 103 to 118 kilograms. This estimate matters greatly; the IACRC and NFA Council use it to base decisions on the volume of rice to import each year. This 14.5 percent increase meant that an *additional* 1.28 million metric tons of rice could be imported legally. Some experts decried the change, calling it a ruse.[63] Data-massaging figures prominently in nonfunctional rice import regimes, and it was an overlooked contributor to the flood of imports in the following year and the regional rice crisis.

[60] Pefianco 2003.
[61] "Smuggling Not Limited to Rice," business.inquirer.net, February 6, 2014 (last accessed November 6, 2023).
[62] Indexmundi.com/agriculture (citing USDA data). [63] Mendoza 2011.

Before turning to that 2008 debacle, we need to address why Arroyo preferred excessive importing to smuggling. If her sole motivation was to maintain supply in order to contain rice prices, she could have allowed the smuggling to continue unabated. Yet her preference derived from a signal difference in form between smuggling and over-importing. As characterized above, smuggling helps to "spread the sunshine." It does so diffusely, as gains course through an expansive network of officials stationed at the islands' many ports, small and large alike. From there, the money flows upward. Excessive importing, especially via the NFA, unlike smuggling, enters the system from the top. It is more a centralized form of graft and easier to control from above, enabling the dispersal of its largess by Arroyo with more precision.

Arroyo's motivation to dispense patronage from 2005 to 2007 was pronounced even by Philippine presidential standards. It was informed by two specific political factors operating at the time. First, because of the vote rigging scandal that hounded her 2004 victory, her presidency suffered from a legitimacy deficit dire enough that impeachment charges were filed against her in the House of Representatives on three separate occasions. She survived each challenge owing to congressional support that was costly to procure. According to one seasoned observer, "brazen cash payouts from the Palace" flowed into Congress.[64] While the Palace may have squeezed patronage resources from many sources, it was widely reported that a US$25–30 commission was attached to each ton of imported rice. Based on official data for 2005 to 2007, this would roughly amount to US$145 million.[65]

The second political variable pertained to the regularity of Philippine elections. A NFA manager once told me that elections had kept his agency in existence.[66] Arroyo's electoral coalition (Team Unity) spent heavily on the 2007 mid-term elections. Even with her popularity in free fall, according to Thompson, "her clientelist networks, warlord allies and electoral manipulators were still strong enough to win a majority of seats in the lower house – a victory of 'command' over 'market' votes."[67] However, her team lost the Senate, whose members, unlike in the House, are elected in nationwide constituencies.

In 2008, implications of Arroyo's stratagem of excessive importing (with kickbacks attached) gained new dimensions in two significant ways. The first was its regional implications. Starting in 2007, global grain prices other than rice began to surge, due to myriad factors; increasing

[64] Hutchcroft 2010, p. 141.
[65] "Guingona: DA, NFA Execs Making Millions," *Philippine Star*, March 10, 2010.
[66] Interview, Rex Estoperez, Manila, June 9, 2014. [67] Thompson 2010, p. 12.

biofuel mandates and weak oil prices numbered among them. Late in the year, rice prices finally joined the upward march. But they did so at a quicker pace due to questionable government decisions and panic buying. India's export ban of non-basmati rice, followed by uncertainty emanating from Vietnam over a cold snap in its north and over its government's flip-flop on its own export ban, spooked importing countries. In response, the NFA swiftly ordered a large purchase from Vietnam in late 2007, which pushed prices on the thin international market further upward. The NFA continued buying from Vietnam even as prices trebled from a year prior and unprecedentedly pierced the US $1000 per metric ton barrier. For a time, the NFA even paid a premium of US$150 per ton over prevailing prices.[68] In the end, Arroyo's government imported a national record of 2.45 million metric tons. Yap, who served as agriculture secretary during the crisis, recounted that it was the duty of the government to ensure that adequate rice was available for all Filipinos, regardless of the impact of his government's purchases on the international market.[69] It was a classic case of "beggar-thy-neighbor" actions of one country that hurt others in the pocketbook.[70] A Filipino senator suggested that the overimportations were the product of a panicked administration that feared the bad press of long lines of Filipinos waiting to purchase rationed quantities of their staple food.[71]

Domestic prices rose sharply enough that the NFA was forced to raise the price of its subsidized rice from P18 to P25 per kilogram. While some of these gains were captured by paddy growers, they were disproportionately enjoyed by millers and traders. By September, prices began to ease, and although prices continued their decline, in 2009, they were still above precrisis levels.[72]

During and after the crisis, Arroyo's administration faced familiar accusations. In 2008 alone, it overimported by about a half-million tons; the NFA countered that it was pressed to fulfill buffer stock obligations.[73] A second charge grew out of the first – the overpricing of imports. Reports suggested that commissions had risen considerably to US$100 to 125 per metric ton. The NFA's own internal audit found that for 2008 and 2009 Arroyo's government generated a whopping US$523 million in economic rents from 1.75 million metric tons.[74] Since the

[68] Dawe and Slayton 2010. [69] Interview, Arthur Yap, Manila, September 20, 2018.
[70] Freedman 2013. [71] Anonymous interview, Manila, September 17, 2018.
[72] Balisacan, Sombilla, and Dikitanan 2010.
[73] "Solons Grill Agri Chief Over Rice Scam," newsinfo.inquirer.net, September 17, 2008 (last accessed August 11, 2014).
[74] "Peasant Group Urges Noynoy to Prosecute Arroyo and Others for NFA Overpricing," bulalat.com, January 14, 2011 (last accessed November 6, 2023).

Figure 5.1 Imports arriving at Manila's port during the 2008 rice crisis. (Credit/Sarah *Encabo*/*The Manila Times*)

specter of impeachment by 2008 was behind Arroyo, coupled with her ineligibility to seek reelection, one can only speculate that motivations of politicians, officials, and loyalists had grown more nakedly predatory, avaricious, and venal.[75] The so-called midnight imports that Arroyo ordered before she left office in 2010 – despite well-stocked NFA warehouses[76] – may have been tied to her decision to run for a seat in the House of Representatives after her presidency, which she won, having spent lavishly on her campaign.[77] The NFA's own audit team

[75] "Rice in Every Plate," 2004; Anonymous interview, Philippine Senator, Manila, September 17, 2018.
[76] "Midnight Rice Importation by Arroyo Administration," tubagbohol.mikeligalig.com, *Bohol Chronicle*, August 4, 2010 (last accessed November 6, 2023).
[77] She won a congressional seat in 2010 and gained the House Speaker post in 2018.

subsequently described the rice import regime of the sunset years of Arroyo's presidency as "legalized smuggling."[78] No one from her administration was ever charged for their actions.

Benigno Aquino III

Presidents must reckon with the legacies of their predecessors. The exceptional strength of the Philippine presidency – institutionally stronger than the premiership in post-Mahathir Malaysia and presidencies in post-Soeharto Indonesia – makes this platitude all the more pertinent.[79] Arroyo was succeeded by Benigno Aquino III, an undistinguished senator and son of former president, Corazon Aquino. Aquino III had lacked ambition to follow his mother's footsteps. But when she passed away ahead of the 2010 election, an unanticipated groundswell of emotion and nostalgia swept the country and eventually swept the scion and Liberal Party stalwart into Malacañang, the presidential palace.

To distinguish himself from Arroyo, Aquino III ran on an anti-corruption, good governance platform. He used his first SONA in 2010 to underscore the ineptitude and rot of his predecessor's administration. He singled out the embattled NFA, attacking it for its massive over-imports and for mismanagement and citing its enormous debt of PhP177 billion, or slightly over US$4 billion, to seal his case.[80] The figure's enormity was startling. In 2001, when Arroyo assumed the presidency, liabilities had stood at about PhP 12 billion. While not an insignificant sum, many local experts deemed it an acceptable amount given the NFA's basic approach, as mandated in its charter, to buy high and sell low (and also store long). If the government felt compelled to subsidize rice for low-income consumers and provide a *palay* floor price for cultivators, this was a price worth paying, for societal purposes. Now that the NFA's debt had ballooned some fourteenfold, transforming the authority into the country's largest loss-making state agency, this argument was harder to sustain.

Price movements during the first decade of the 2000s were in part to blame. At times, the gap between the agency's selling price to consumers and domestic wholesale prices ranged between 20 and 40 percent. To plug the revenue gap, the NFA borrowed from local banks. Yet the persistent borrowing was also driven by its proclivity to buy foreign rice to earn revenue to pay the finance charges on its loans and to generate

[78] "NFA Assures Eradication of 'Rice Smuggling'," radyonatin.com (last accessed November 6, 2023). On Arroyo's corruption in general, and her damage to democratic institutions, see Quimpo (2009).

[79] Rocamora 1994, p. 50; Manacsa and Tan 2005; Thompson 2014.

[80] SONA 2010.

rents for NFA management and its linked networks. Tellingly, as the agency's borrowings grew, its domestic procurement plunged. In 2007, the NFA procured about one-twentieth of the volume of *palay* it had purchased in 2000, underscoring the minimal impact the agency had on farmgate or retail prices.[81]

By approving the relentless borrowing, the state was complicit in the financial quagmire. Its representatives from the OOP, Finance Department, Trade and Industry Department, Philippine Central Bank, and presidents of three state banks served on the NFA Council. The three banks alone reportedly secured 40 percent of the borrowings.[82]

Having inherited NFA's outstanding liabilities, Aquino's government restructured portions of the debt. It increased allocations of rice that private actors could import (although still via the NFA), and it unloaded some of the debt onto other departments, reducing the NFA's short-term debt by billions.[83] But restructuring was only effective thanks to the less appreciated side of Arroyo's legacy, that is, undeniable economic growth and the fiscal space that accompanied it. Under her watch, on account of a series of tough reforms, such as an increased corporate tax rate and value added tax, the economy expanded by one-and-half times. It experienced over 30 quarters of uninterrupted growth, the average annual GDP growth rate of 4.6 percent bettered those under every president since and including Marcos, and the stock market soared. However, inequality worsened, for the impact of Arroyo's policies mostly bypassed poor rural Filipinos.[84]

To initiate pro-poor growth, Aquino somewhat ironically assumed the mantle of the production nationalist, given the identity's association with former President Marcos.[85] In his 2011 SONA, he attributed the slashing of annual rice imports in half to effective government intervention in rice cultivation.[86] Adhering to the Green Revolution legacy, he then

[81] OECD 2017, p. 117, figure 2.2; Intal, Cu, and Illescas 2012.
[82] The Development Bank of the Philippines, the Land Bank, and the Philippine National Bank. "NFA Council Not Employees to Blame," opinion.inquirer.net, May 30, 2011 (last accessed November 7, 2023).
[83] "Philippine National Food Authority Carries $3.4 Billion of Debt," pacificadvisorsllc.com, December 28, 2011 (last accessed October 2, 2016).
[84] Mendoza and Timberman 2019a, especially pp. 26–27; "GMA's Legacy: Economy, Infra, Integration," *BizNewsAsia*, no. 19, 2009, cited in Thompson 2010 (n. 73, p. 27); ADB 2009, pp. 1–3; Abinales 2010.
[85] There is historical animosity between the Marcos and Aquino family dynasties. Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos are responsible for the assassination of Corazon's husband, Benigno Aquino Jr., in 1983.
[86] SONA 2011.

launched yet another unremarkable paddy production program. Having set a target of 2013 to achieve complete self-sufficiency, in 2012, he plowed record monies (PhP24.4 billion; about US$555 million) into a prototypical production nationalist department – the National Irrigation Agency. The decision even alarmed food sovereignty advocates, who queried the rewarding of an underperforming and corrupt state agency.[87]

The World Bank could hardly oppose the budget allocation. In general, it supports irrigation enhancement, and the plan was still superior to output or input subsidies that Arroyo's administration had pursued. In time, the spending had some of its intended effect: Paddy production did grow from 18.0 million tons in 2012 to about 19.2 million by 2017, which translated to about 95 percent of self-sufficiency.[88] While still short of his goal of complete self-sufficiency, Aquino could still proudly declare in a subsequent SONA: "We have truly come so far from those days when it was said that we could not even feed ourselves."[89] Mostly larger farmers benefited from the production uptick, however, and overall productivity growth was too lackluster to lower rice prices comprehensively. Population growth and high marketing costs, including poor rural road accessibility and a lack of wholesale *palay* markets, continued to be prime impediments.[90]

Unlike Arroyo, Aquino never pledged to liberalize rice imports. Not only had he positioned himself as a production nationalist, but also he sought to avoid antagonizing the country's Left. The latter is a constellation of organizations, many of whom share (or formerly shared) links to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its National Democratic Front, other left-leaning parties, or the legal national-democratic social movements they have spawned. These groups have remained rather influential since the country's return to democracy in 1986, and Aquino felt some affinity for their support of his vulnerable mother during trying times of her presidency.

Coalitional relations, even among peoples or grassroots organizations, are frequently in flux as structural and political conditions change. Groups splinter, form new alliances, and clash on matters of politics or policy.[91]

[87] "Farmers Want Audit of Irrigation Projects," interaksyon.com, June 1, 2012 (last accessed August 11, 2014).
[88] PSA data (openstat.psa.gov.ph, "Rice and Corn Utility Accounts"; last accessed April 2, 2024).
[89] SONA 2013.
[90] Dawe, Moya, and Casiwan 2006; Bordey, Moya, Beltran, et al. 2016.
[91] Bello, Cardenas, Cruz, *et al.*, 2004, pp. 75–78; Quiampo 2008, pp. 8–11, 58. Boudreau (2001) writes that "Philippine protest organizations are confoundingly involuted" (p. 20).

Although generally more influential than their counterparts in Malaysia and in Indonesia, almost uniformly, they fear the dumping of cheap foreign rice into the country. Doing so, they insist, will condemn petty commodity cultivators to destitution, forcing them to sell their land for survival.[92] Without adequate rural job creation – a persistent and long-standing obstacle to local poverty alleviation – such smallholders will likely join the class of impoverished agricultural laborers.

If Aquino was unwilling to confront the formidable Left or the Green Revolution legacy of state-led rice imports, how was he to contain rice prices from rising amid a middling production program? Overimportation was a nonstarter, having chided Arroyo for doing precisely this in his first SONA. Aquino instead drew from another unofficial policy of past presidents – smuggling. While no one accused him of personally profiting from the smuggling in monetary terms, there was a firm sense that his administration benefited politically from the flood of extralegal supply of rice under his watch. Artificially low rice prices helped to undergird mass support for the administration's policies. When the popularity of Aquino's presidency was at its peak during its first two years, an estimated PhP16.6 billion worth of rice (over US$36.3 million) was smuggled into the country. Critics maintained that officials had to be involved in the rackets that came to light in sensational fashion in 2012 and 2013. After all, rice is a cheap commodity that requires bulk smuggling to be profitable, making the possibility of hiding the bags improbable.[93] This unofficial policy, of course, was at cross-purposes with the official pursuit of obtaining self-sufficiency.

Exogenous institutional matters aided the smuggling surge. When sides failed to reach an agreement on the country's WTO exemption that was set to expire in 2012, traders took advantage of the indeterminacy; they imported without NFA-issued licenses. (Some reused expired permits with greater impunity.) Although officials continued to refer to these activities as smuggling, in 2014, a Davao court decided that the seizure of four million metric tons by the BOC was improper because the WTO exemption had expired. The court appeared to be following the policy advice of Justice Secretary Leila de Lima. In a leaked confidential memo to Aquino and the DA, she had written that: "though this issue may be directly a rice-related matter, its effects cannot be isolated as merely a DA-NFA matter, considering that we are dealing with an

[92] Despite a ten-year waiting period before reform beneficiaries can alienate their land, there is a thriving illegal market of premature unreported sales.

[93] Tiglao 2012; Interview, Romeo David, former NFA Administrator, Manila, July 24, 2014.

international trade agreement, the breach of which may have consequences that would not be wise to oversimplify."[94] Vietnam, the largest exporter of rice to the Philippines, was also dragged into the fray. When attacked by the Philippine press for abetting the smuggling, Vietnam's rice exporting regulatory body retorted that NFA permits were unnecessary since the WTO-led QR regime was no longer in effect.[95] In exchange for a waiver from the WTO to extend the special treatment of rice for another three years, Aquino's government agreed to increase the MAV to 850,000 metric tons, along with additional concessions in the dairy sector. Liberalization supporters, for their part, began calling smugglers "heroes" for their role in bringing down rice prices and in turn in helping to alleviate hunger and chronic malnutrition in the country.[96]

By the time Aquino turned to another Liberal Party luminary, former Senator Francis Pangilinan, to help bring order to the NFA and other state agencies on food matters by creating for him a new specialized umbrella post, two more heads of the NFA had been forced out following corruption allegations. More importantly, the president's broader reform program had also begun to swoon along with his popularity. This was despite the impressive economic growth his government was delivering – an average 6.2 percent per annum, the highest in Asia over the period save for China[97] – on top of the sound fiscal policies for which his administration was responsible.[98] Around the same time as Pangilinan's appointment, however, it was learned in 2013 that Aquino's administration had been taking advantage of a massive slush fund (US$4.2 billion), known as the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP). The DAP was intended to accelerate spending on large-scale development projects. Unfortunately for Aquino, the Supreme Court ruled the DAP unconstitutional in 2015. With this embarrassing political defeat, coupled with the lingering effects of a scandalous congressional pork barrel affair, the tragic killing of over forty elite police personnel during a botched raid of an Islamist insurgent

[94] "DOJ Memo on Rice Import Withheld," manilastandardtoday.com, February 26, 2014 (last accessed July 18, 2017).
[95] "Vietnam Questions NFA Regulation on Rice Imports," philstar.com, November 4, 2013 (last accessed November 8, 2023).
[96] For example, "Insane Rice Policy," philstar.com, April 25, 2018 (last accessed November 9, 2023).
[97] "Benigno Aquino's Six-Year Legacy," straitstimes.com, July 6, 2016 (last accessed November 10, 2023)
[98] The fiscal space Aquino had inherited from Arroyo (2.8 percent of the budget) had soared nearly sevenfold under his watch (Mendoza and Timberman 2019b, p. 233). The 2012 Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act and the K–12 educational system reform count among other achievements.

stronghold on Mindanao, and government ineptitude at rebuilding the city of Tacloban that was devastated by a 2013 super-typhoon, Aquino's presidency limped to the finish line. Apparently, the Philippine electorate was growing weary of elite-led, technocratic liberal reformism of the kind Aquino's government had epitomized. The electorate instead favored a candidate who represented a form of violent illiberal reformism.[99] Rather surprisingly, this authoritarian-leaning populist would liberalize the country's rice import trade. In one of his last official acts as president, perhaps without the least bit of irony, Aquino signed the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act (RA 10845).

Duterte

Candidate Rodrigo Duterte, the mayor of the largest city on Mindanao, promised a relentless campaign of bloodshed against drug dealers and users. Beginning in 2016, the new president delivered on his campaign pledge: State agents killed over 13,000 citizens, according to human rights groups, during the first two years or so of Duterte's presidency (and over 30,000 over his six-year term). While his campaign slogan of "Change is Coming" did not reference rice import liberalization, Duterte did deregulate this trade and in the process induced significant change in the country.

For the first few years, Duterte's administration had stressed the Green Revolution legacy of improving the country's paddy production capacity, causing one veteran agricultural economist and columnist to quip exasperatingly: "Oh, no, not again."[100] The government also maintained the status quo on rice imports. In 2017, Duterte signed an executive order (no. 23) that, while acknowledging the eventual removal of the QR system, sought to extend the WTO-related waiver for another three years. But this order did little to quell acute cabinet infighting over the request and over private sector participation in rice imports. The high level of internal fractiousness elicited considerable public commentary.[101] The squabbling led to the firing of the agriculture undersecretary, who was scapegoated for the NFA's order of more than one million metric tons of rice from Thailand that the agriculture secretary and NFA administrator had backed but that the NFA Council had opposed. The latter favored private sector transactions.

Slightly more than a year later, Duterte put an end to his government's internal dissension on the matter. In October 2018, his spokesperson

[99] Thompson 2016. [100] Habito 2016. [101] Rocamora 2017.

announced the administration's intent to liberalize rice imports. The news shocked the country's trade advocates, as well as Duterte's agriculture secretary, Emmanuel Piñol. The former were pleased, the latter less so.[102]

The proximate trigger for the volte-face was the government's fear of rising inflation;[103] only higher food prices were seemingly capable of denting Duterte's high approval ratings. During Duterte's first full year in office, inflation registered at nearly three percent, in line with Central Bank projections and with recent past rates. But rises in commodity and oil prices spurred inflationary pressures in 2018. Increases in rice prices owing to a prolonged drought were particularly impactful, as rice comprised nine percent of the consumer price index. From 1.5 percent early in the year, commodity inflation rose to 5 percent in July and 6 percent in August, worsening food security for tens of millions of poor Filipinos.[104]

Higher oil prices stemmed from the government's then newly implemented Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN). TRAIN aimed to institute more progressive taxation by reducing individual income and estate taxes for most employed Filipinos and by increasing consumption taxes in order to shift cost burdens onto wealthier citizens. In early 2018, the government raised excise taxes on petroleum, automobiles, and other goods. Since TRAIN was a policy centerpiece, passed through Congress in 2017 (RA No. 10963), Duterte's economic team was unwilling to scrap it for its short-term impact on inflation. Further tax reform programs were planned as well. According to an authoritative account on the matter, Duterte's team, led by Carlos "Sonny" Dominguez III, the Finance Minister, convinced Duterte to liberalize rice imports as a means to dampen inflation.[105] According to Duterte's spokesperson, the "decision to liberalize was the ultimate means to rein in inflation as far as food items are concerned."[106] While Duterte let it be

[102] Ramon Clarete, comments made at the forum "Beyond Rice Tariffication: Challenges and Opportunities in Modernizing Philippine Agriculture," Social Weather Station, Manila, October 4, 2019; "Piñol Disputes Roque's Claim Duterte Ordered 'Unimpeded' Rice Imports," news.abs-cbn.com, October 9, 2018 (last accessed November 8, 2023).

[103] Tolentino and de la Peña 2020.

[104] "Why Rice Tariffication Does Not Guarantee Lower Rice Prices," ibon.org, August 25, 2018 (last accessed November 9, 2024).

[105] Tolentino and de la Peña 2020, p. 28. Also interview, Ciel Habito, Manila, July 15, 2024. Other influential members included Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia, and Central Bank officials worried about rising inflation.

[106] "Duterte Orders 'Unimpeded' Rice Imports to Tame Philippine Inflation," asia.nikkei.com, October 9, 2018 (last accessed November 10, 2023).

known that as president he "had the final say on rice imports," he had shown marked deference to his policymaking team.[107]

The populist Duterte won the presidency with the backing of a broad sociopolitical coalition, including the Left, elements with which Duterte had worked closely for decades while running the city of Davao. However, starting in 2017, Duterte's relations with the Left frayed, as peace talks with the New People's Army, the armed wing of the CPP, floundered. Feeling betrayed, he turned the country's security forces loose on activists, leftists, Communists, journalists, community leaders, and others with impunity. He added them to "kill lists" as he had done with suspected urban drug dealers and users.[108] In retrospect, his break with the Left, which included farmer advocacy groups, also eased Duterte's dramatic decision to liberalize rice imports.

With Duterte's control of Congress, once the decision was made, the corresponding legislation was a fait accompli. Typical of Philippine politics, Duterte's victory had prompted representatives from opposition parties to flock to his once small regional party known as PDP-Laban (Filipino Democratic Party).[109] In this party system, party loyalty is generally flimsy, and politicians in the main prefer belonging to the group in power to gain access to state resources and other patronage opportunities. Aquino had spent few resources on party-building; Duterte would do likewise.[110]

In February 2019, Duterte signed RA No.11203, or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), which amended the 1996 Agricultural Tariffication Act (RA No. 8178). Of the RTL's three primary components, the first eliminated the QR system for rice imports and replaced it with three main tariff tiers: 35 percent for countries that comprise the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), 40 percent for non-ASEAN countries up to 350,00 metric tons, and 50 percent for non-ASEAN members above 350,000 metric tons. Second, the law limited the NFA's scope to regulatory functions, buffer-stocking, and emergency distribution (especially during the natural disasters that buffet the country regularly). Third, the RTL mandated establishing a Rice Competitive Enhancement Fund (RCEF). Via the allocation of PhP10 billion in tariff revenue per year for a 6-year period, the RCEF was intended to fund

[107] "Strengthen Local Rice Production," opinion.inquirer.net, May 1, 2017 (last accessed November 10, 2023); Clarete, Esguerra, and Hill, 2018, p. 43; Tolentino and de la Peña 2020, p. 28.
[108] "Philippines: End Deadly 'Red-Tagging' of Activists," hrw.org, January 17, 2022 (last accessed November 10, 2023).
[109] Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan, or PDP-Laban.
[110] Timberman 2016; Hutchcroft 2019, p. 8.

programs and projects to improve rice growing productivity.[111] It was the price to pay to mollify some of the country's production nationalist agencies; some reformers preferred the monies were instead used as direct cash transfers to affected farmers.[112]

Rice trade marketization was arguably the country's largest piece of reform legislation since the 1998 liberalization of oil prices.[113] If the reformers are proven right, the lowering of rice prices resulting from freer trade would have the potential to make substantial and sustainable contributions toward poverty alleviation. But because the lowering of rice prices was expected to curtail cultivators' income, the RCEF was deemed essential. Even Duterte critics acknowledged the RTL's pro-poor potential.[114]

Results seemed promising: The 2018 inflation rate of 5.2 percent was halved the year following liberalization, and government tax revenue climbed noticeably. Duterte was also motivated to keep inflation in check ahead of the 2019 mid-term elections, which his PDP-Laban would dominate, thereby cementing his already powerful position. After the mid-term elections, Agriculture Secretary Piñol resigned his post. He was replaced by William Dar, a former (interim) agriculture secretary who was considered more pliable.

The extent to which changes brought about by trade reform were salutary or harmful seemed to depend on one's a priori views on deregulation. Amid postreform uncertainty, two interrelated facts were beyond dispute. First was the deluge in imports via private channels – a record 3.1 million metric tons in 2019. Second, the deluge did lower retail prices for consumers *and* farmgate prices for cultivators.

Stories sensationalizing the latter filled headlines. Reports poured in on drops of some 30 percent in *palay* prices in some locales. The data was difficult to verify, however, and the DA blamed farmers' groups and the NFA for exaggerating the decline to exploit public sympathy for producers and to apply pressure on Congress and the administration to repeal the RTL.[115] For its part, the NFA let it be known that reform jeopardized the jobs of over one thousand of its staffers, and its ally,

[111] Rice Farm Machineries and Equipment 50 percent; Rice Seed Development, Propagation, and Promotion 30 percent; Expanded Rice Credit Assistance 10 percent; and Rice Extension Services 10 percent (section 13). In late 2024, these percentages were amended and the RCEF was extended to 2031.

[112] Interview, Ciel Habito, Manila, July 15, 2024.

[113] Rood 2019, p. 117.

[114] Collas-Monsod 2019.

[115] "Gov't Hits Disinformation on Farmgate Prices of Rice," business.inquirer.net, October 5, 2020 (last accessed November 8, 2023).

Grecon, warned of a wave of bankruptcies among small-to-medium industry players.[116]

By late 2019, more trustworthy data recorded average retail prices for regular milled and well-milled rice at PhP37.22 and PhP41.89 per kilogram, or 14.4 percent and 18.6 percent lower, respectively, than the same period in 2018. But publication did not foreclose further debate. Opponents took pot shots at NEDA's faulty models for having predicted retail prices of regular milled rice of around PhP 25 following reform. That prices were nearly 50 percent higher was caused by the disappearance from the market of PhP27 NFA subsidized rice; pricey high-grade varieties also comprised the preponderance of imports.[117]

Detractors also pointed to the ample evidence substantiating the plunge in farmgate prices of 35 percent, from PhP22 per kilogram to PhP 14.40. This jarring result rendered the difference in decline between that of retail and farmgate prices of about 20.6 percent. It was a windfall for traders. One commentator derisively hailed marketization for the latter's liberation. The same editorial calculated a PhP38.6 billion welfare gain for consumers against a PhP80 billion loss for cultivators.[118] This gap of PhP41.4 billion, however, was misleading. Calculations did not account for rice purchasing among cultivators. (One study put the share of net buyers among paddy growers at roughly one quarter, and presumably among the poorest.[119])

Marketization proponents could not deny the imbalanced impact of reform on smallholders. From the think tank Action for Economic Reforms (AER) and agricultural economists such as Ramon Clarete to Dominguez and Dar from the cabinet, they urged patience to let the market soothe reform's teething problems in due time.[120] Others trumpeted the cushioning effects of nonmarket mechanisms, such as the RCEF disbursement.[121] Yet even statistics published by the pro-reform AER showed that disbursements were only approximately 56 percent of legal obligations (as of early 2021).[122] If market reformers could find such fault with the RCEF, critics certainly could find others. One was capture by large farmers, since half of the RCEF's budget was allocated for equipment beyond the means of the average poor grower.[123] Another

[116] "More Than 1,000 Jobs at NFA to Be Erased as Rice Import Limits Removed," business.inquirer.net, January 21, 2020 (last accessed November 8, 2023).
[117] Montemayor 2020. [118] Ibid.
[119] Balié, Minot, and Valera 2021. Balié was IRRI's director.
[120] For example, see "Rice Tariff Law a Year Later: Prices Down But Farmers Lose," newsinfo.inquirer.net, March 4, 2020 (last accessed November 8, 2023).
[121] Briones 2020. [122] Action for Economic Reforms 2021.
[123] See note 111 on the detailed allocations.

was the minuscule volume of RCEF spending as mandated in the RTL. Its annual allocation of US$182 million paled in comparison to yearly government support of the rice sector elsewhere – quoted as US$1.1 billion in Vietnam, US$4.4 billion in Thailand, US$12 billion in India, and US$16 billion in Japan.[124]

Some unforeseen effects of deregulation had to do with the COVID-19 pandemic that reached the country in early 2020. Not only did tens of thousands of citizens succumb to the coronavirus, but in 2020, amid some of world's strictest lockdowns imposed by the Duterte government, the pandemic had a historically suppressive impact on the country's economy. GDP shrank 9.6 percent, or the "steepest one-year drop in GDP ever recorded (since the start of official national accounts in 1941)."[125] Since COVID-19 transmissions thrived in the expansive density of social interactions, urban sectors were hit harder by heavier caseloads and by more restrictive lockdowns than were rural sectors. As a result, in 2020, the country's agricultural sector recorded positive growth (just so at 0.2 percent).[126] This performance was assisted by another unexpected outcome – a record paddy harvest of 19.4 million metric tons (which was slightly surpassed the following year). It was surprising, not only because it was achieved under conditions of restricted mobility, but because deregulation opponents had argued that lower farmgate prices would depress the incentives of cultivators to plant more paddy. The record harvest was likely aided by favorable weather. In the main, it is why the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 did not lead to extreme rice shortages regionally, despite dire prognostications of some.[127] As Briones points out, however, within the Philippines, it was still gratifying to know that the unreliable NFA was no longer primed to produce a rice crisis of its own accord as it had on past occasions.[128]

Marcos Jr.

The intertwined challenges of food inflation and food security unexpectedly took center stage in the administration of Duterte's successor, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the late dictator's son and loser of the 2016 vice-presidential contest to Maria Leonor "Leni" Robredo. In 2022, Marcos Jr. turned the tables on Robredo, incalculably aided by a tsunami of online disinformation and by his own powerhouse vice-presidential mate, Sarah Duterte, the former president's eldest daughter.

[124] Africa 2019. [125] Briones and Espineli 2023, p. 80. [126] Ibid.
[127] Davidson 2023. [128] Briones and Espineli 2023.

Confoundingly, she had opted not to run for the presidency, despite the urging of supporters and enticing polling numbers.[129]

President Marcos Jr.'s choice to appoint himself agriculture secretary was equally stupefying. That in a strong presidential system the president would concurrently hold a cabinet position, let alone the agriculture portfolio, was unusual. But with food inflation uncomfortably on the rise due to a combination of Russia's 2022 invasion of wheat-exporting Ukraine, lingering effects of the pandemic, and the country's high dependency on food imports more generally, Marcos Jr. at least drew fresh attention to the seriousness of the need to revitalize and modernize the country's food production and marketing systems. He also delivered a hefty 40 percent bump in the DA's budget over which he would preside.[130] Questions were raised, however, over Marcos Jr.'s competency, amplified by his bombastic campaign promise to bring down rice retail prices as low as PhP20 per kilogram. While the pledge may have been a (successful) populist ploy, it was disconcerting if the DA head believed this policy goal was realistic and worthwhile to pursue. Candidate Marcos Jr. had also threatened to repeal the RTL, a stance that was at strict cross-purposes with his PhP20 per kilo aspiration.

Some motivation for Marcos Jr.'s decision to head the DA was revealed a few months into his administration. In late 2022, he staged a recreation of a famous 1966 photo of his *barong*-wearing father alongside the inaugural IRRI director Robert Chandler and US President Lyndon Johnson (see Figure 5.2). In a crouching position, Johnson is inspecting paddy stalks that heralded the start and symbolized the potential of the Green Revolution.[131] Like the original photo op, the 2022 version shows Marcos Jr. wearing a *barong*, intently listening to the IRRI director, and flanked by bespectacled crop scientists sporting white shirts and dark colored ties. (Absent is US President Biden.) While Duterte smashed the decades-long post-Green Revolution protectionist model by (partially)

[129] She won 32 million votes, one million more than Marcos Jr., who in turn routed Robredo by about 31 percentage points. By 2024, the vice-president had a hostile falling out with the president. She resigned from her cabinet post as education secretary and accused the president of plotting her assassination. In 2025, the Supreme Court annulled her impeachment trial, although it left open the possibility of a trail at a later date.

[130] Nguyen 2022; "Philippines' Marcos Seeks Record $94 Billion Budget for 2023," asia.nikkei.com, August 22, 2022 (last accessed November 8, 2023).

[131] "LOOK: Marcos Jr. Recreates Father's Iconic Photo at IRRI," newsinfo.inquirer.net, November 29, 2022 (last accessed November 8, 2023). *Barong* is an embroidered shirt worn by Filipino men on formal occasions. In this version of the photo Marcos Jr. is not intently listening to the IRRI director. That photo can be found at: https://manilastandard.net/?p=314283188.

Figure 5.2 Marcos Jr. in IRRI's paddyfields, 2022.
(Credit/*Philippine News Agency*)

opening the rice trade, Marcos Jr. tried his own approach at dismantling – to invoke symbolically the magic of the Green Revolution led by his father. Peculiarly, the son was neither promoting a newsworthy technological breakthrough nor seeking a legitimacy boost, having won the presidency quite handily only months prior.

Owing to record harvests and Duterte's liberalization, the country had dodged a rice crisis. Instead, it was hit by successive waves of shortages and price spikes of other commodities. The new administration hurriedly ordered massive imports of sugar, onions, and eggs to tamper prices, leaving one commentator to quip, "Our secretary of agriculture would have been fired by now, were he not the President himself."[132] Then, by mid-2023, the soaring price of rice that besieged Malaysia (Chapter 4) and Indonesia (Chapter 5) beset the Philippines. A rice crisis was brewing, although Marcos Jr. was still touting his PhP20 promise and an ample supply of national rice stocks.[133] Others knew better.

The NFA sought to skirt RTL prohibitions and proposed importing 500,000 metric tons of rice, permitted under emergency conditions.

[132] Habito 2023.
[133] "Bongbong Marcos Says No Rice Crisis Expected But Gov't Still Open to Import," April 20, 2023, newsinfo.inquirer.net (last accessed November 10, 2023).

Fearing the formation of rice queues, the president's refusal to declare an emergency scuttled the NFA's plans.[134] Another cause of concern was preliminary data indicating a poor 2022–23 harvest – down nearly 20 percent from records set in 2020–21 and 2021–22 because of soaring chemical fertilizer prices. In response, private dealers established a new national import record: In 2022–23, their delivery of 3.8 million metric tons of rice surpassed totals in China. For the year, no country imported more rice than did the Philippines.[135]

Marcos Jr. opted not to wait for the arrival of record imports to dampen prices, and in August 2023, controversially capped prices at PhP41 per kilogram for regular milled rice and PhP45 for well-milled. Irate rice deleers vowed to disregard the order, having had purchased stocks above these prices. Critics cited a rise in black market activity as a likely outcome of the cap. Seemingly, government and media obliged: Reports on a series of BOC raids on warehouses proliferated.[136] After all, Marcos Jr. had claimed that smuggling and hoarding had forced him to impose price controls in the first place (although smuggling and hoarding affect prices in opposite directions).[137] The cap lasted about five weeks. The president rejected the advice of some members of his economic team to lift (temporarily) the tariffs on imported rice in their entirety in order to relieve inflationary pressure.[138]

Macros Jr.'s two campaign promises were on a collision course. He campaigned on the RTL's repeal, but removing tariffs and inviting another deluge of rice imports were a step too far for the son of a preeminent production nationalist. Yet leaving the RTL in place was necessary to realize his pledge of PhP20 rice. For Marcos Jr., the approach was wrong: He wanted to achieve his goal not via trade – that lacks pride and valor. Rather, he preferred a heroic program of cultivation – in this instance, by vastly improving the cost efficiency of producing rice. His stated price point would drag farmgate prices down to about PhP10 per kilogram, a level that would impoverish paddy producers unconscionably. As the self-sufficiency rate in rice since the RTL has

[134] "NFA Abandons Planned Rice Importation," newsinfo.inquirer.net, April 18, 2023 (last accessed November 10, 2023.

[135] USDA 2022; "USDA: Philippines to Takeover China as World's Top Rice Importer," gmanetwork.com, September 14, 2023 (last accessed November 10, 2023).

[136] "BOC Files Agri Smuggling Complaints vs. Rice Importers," cnnphilippines.com, October 1, 2023 (last accessed November 10, 2023).

[137] "Junior: Smuggling, Hoarding, Forcing Me to Impose Price Caps," *ANC Digital News*, September 22, 2023 (last accessed at youtube.com, November 10, 2023).

[138] Marcos Jr. extended reduced tariffs (of 35 percent for imports) from 2022 to 2024. Soon after lifting the cap, he named a businessman from the fishing sector as agriculture secretary.

plummeted to about 80 percent, the tentacles of the Green Revolution's contested legacy have constricted the president tightly, uneasily.

Conclusion: Philippine Exceptionalism

In lieu of a standard conclusion, I bring this chapter to a close with a brief comparative historical analysis of Duterte's liberalization of rice imports. This Philippine president did, after all, bring some fifty years of policy continuity to an end and broke with a storied tradition of policymaking also seen in Indonesia and Malaysia. While rising food inflation may have served as a proximate cause, executives in these latter two cases periodically have contended with rising food inflation without resorting to rice trade liberalization. So, Philippine exceptionalism demands cross-national examination, given the many visible similarities of rice sector governance with Indonesia and Malaysia.

This variable-oriented discussion does not single out a decisive cause in explaining the outcomes in question.[139] More humbly, it proposes reasons that, when considered together, identify the Philippines not as the inevitable case, but as the most likely to open up its rice imports. Outcomes are neither preordained nor irreversible.[140]

Studies of economic reform often begin by evaluating the role of exogenous pressure.[141] Owing to the complicated QR arrangement that the Ramos government agreed to upon entering the WTO in the mid-1990s, subsequent administrations were compelled to renegotiate with the world body intermittently to increase the MAV and to extend the waiver. The WTO, however, did not push Duterte into taking his historic decision. Rice import deregulation was a low priority for the world trade body. It reasoned that aggressive action would have been impolitic, if not counterproductive, and that the Philippines would surrender its special treatment for rice imports *eventually*: How many more times could it renegotiate with WTO country members each time its three-to-five-year exemption was to expire? How many more concessions in other sectors could the government stomach only to retain its unusual arrangement on

[139] In comparative historical tradition, this discussion uses general factors to explain a specific contingent outcome; as such, it cannot control for collinearity the way modern political economy approaches can by using specific factors to explain a general outcome (Hall 1986, p. 260; Simpser, Slater, and Wittenburg 2018).

[140] On most likely cases, see Eckstein (1975); on reversing policy reforms, see Patashnik (2008).

[141] Gourevitch 1986; Haggard 1990 pp. 3, 28; Drazen and Grilli 1993; Krueger 1993. On Southeast Asia, see MacIntyre (2002).

rice imports?[142] Nevertheless, Duterte could have easily agreed to another extension and, like his predecessors, passed the problem on to his successor. In comparison, since Mahathir formed the publicly traded Bernas (Chapter 3) in the mid-to-late 1990s, and since the IMF imposed liberalization on Indonesia during the 1997–98 AFC that was reversed once the country's politics and economy normalized (Chapter 4), imperious external pressure regarding rice trade marketization has hardly surfaced in public in either country.

It is difficult to deduce with precision reasons why Duterte pivoted on the matter, but unquestionably, domestic variables were instrumental. Although fear of rising inflation stands as a reasonable proximate trigger for the turnabout, his predecessors had grappled with inflationary episodes without resorting to rice import deregulation. Above I hypothesized that Duterte's break with the Left seemingly facilitated his decision to pursue liberalization, but neither in Indonesia nor Malaysia has an activist civil society been sufficiently capable of shaping executive decision-making to this extent. Yet, in comparative perspective, we do know that once Duterte accepted the advice of his economic team, he was the most unencumbered executive, institutionally speaking, to implement tough reform.

The Philippine presidency is exceptionally strong. Its institutional autonomy is buttressed by a weak party system that has served as a poor check on presidential power. Key sections of the 1987 post-Marcos constitution were designed to curb presidential authority, epitomized by a one-term limit of six years and the separation of presidential/vice-presidential tickets. But these changes induced unintended consequences. They depressed incentives of politicians to spend valuable resources on building sturdy parties, for example, that could function as reelection vehicles for incumbents. A fluid party system in turn has provided the president with a freer hand in organizing political authority. With broad powers over the budget, that president is afforded abundant opportunities to distribute pork and economic rents to political allies. Taking advantage of the pronounced rush of congressional members to ally with Philippine presidents in order to capture state patronage,[143] Duterte's coalition encompassed over 90 percent of House seats and nearly as much in the Senate. When Duterte decided to deregulate rice imports, Congress expectedly fell in line.

Malaysia's political party system has fragmented since Mahathir's (initial) retirement in 2003. Newer parties (PKR, Amanah, PPBM) have

[142] Interview, Anthony Abad, Manila, September 21, 2018. [143] Kasuya 2009.

emerged as strident competitors with weakened constituent BN parties (UMNO, MCA, MIC). This dispersal of power has produced a series of relatively short-lived governments with weak prime ministers incapable of tackling reforms as difficult as deregulating rice imports (Chapter 3).

While Malaysia practices parliamentary democracy, where heads of government tend to be more beholden to party interests than are executives in presidential democracies, Indonesian presidents have enjoyed less autonomy than their Philippine counterparts have. As in the Philippines, postauthoritarian constitutional amendments were designed to constrain presidential power. The Indonesian presidency still received a boost with the introduction of direct elections in 2004 (to correct for a string of abbreviated presidencies). Even empowered Indonesian presidents have had to cope with rather robust parties.[144] Compared to those in the Philippines, Indonesian parties are more socially embedded, lending them a degree of depth and cohesion that conditions a firmer party system foundation. There, parties (PKB, PAN) have emerged from encompassing Islamic social organizations, from nationalist movements (PDI-P), or even from decades of institutionalized authoritarian patrimonialism (Golkar). The peak, socially rooted institution in the Philippines, the Catholic Church, has sensibly eschewed electoral politics.

Similar to the Philippines, the sharing of the spoils of electoral victories through extensive party and patronage networks has been pervasive. In Indonesia, however, parliamentary and party opposition exists. Notably, PDI-P sat in opposition during both of Yudhoyono's terms and led Parliament's stinging rebuke of his 2011 rice import binge. When Jokowi was running for reelection, members of his own coalition rejected his first choice for vice-president and forced their favored candidate (the Islamic cleric Ma'ruf Amin) onto the 2019 ticket. When Jokowi won a second term more handily than his first, his governing coalition had 30 percent fewer parliamentary seats than Duterte commanded.[145]

Even if the Philippine presidency is institutionally stout, it still begs the question of, save for inflationary pressures, why did Duterte's economic team, led by Sonny Dominguez, press him on liberalizing rice imports in the first place?[146] We know that Duterte pursued a protectionist policy-

[144] Ufen 2008. This remains the case even if Indonesia's party system since has experienced some deinstitutionalization with the rise of such personality-driven parties as the Democrat Party and then Prabowo's Gerindra Party.

[145] Confirming the relative insubstantiality of parties per se as a result of the election, immediately following Duterte's presidency, PDP-Laban's presence in Congress was reduced to three senators and zero members in the House of Representatives.

[146] The public policy literature would hail Dominguez as the lead policy entrepreneur in the enactment of major policy change (Grindle and Thomas 1991, pp. 1–17, 32–42;

as-usual model for his first few years in office. We also know that government technocrats are generally understood as liberalization proponents. But as this book has maintained, in each case they have had to compete with a legacy of pride in Green Revolution success and production nationalism, with entrenched interests and state-led rice import regimes, with beliefs in rice essentialism, and with institutional arrangements lending electoral advantages to ruling parties. Yet over the years, these obstacles had not prevented Philippine technocrats – inside and outside of government[147] – from penning editorials in the press that have implored politicians and policymakers to pursue rice import marketization for its potential in improving public welfare. (Protectionists also have written insightful opinion pieces.) In other words, Philippine technocrats have long held this policy position, as the near-miss reform case of the GSDP under Corazon Aquino and Estrada can attest. But not until Duterte's presidency did their lobbying efforts bear fruit.[148] What about technocrats in Malaysia and in Indonesia? From the Economic Policy Unit in the Prime Minister's Office and the Central Bank in the former[149] to the Finance Ministry in the latter, they likewise disapprove of the inefficiencies of state-led monopolies on rice imports. What then has impeded them from making public appeals to politicians or policymakers? Assuredly, each group of technocrats is situated in differing political environments.[150]

In Malaysia's case, the answer lies in the long politicization of ethnicity and the keen sensitivity of matters related to rice production and producer welfare. They combine to stifle public debate on the consequences of rice import liberalization. As noted in the Introduction and demonstrated in Chapter 3, an agricultural political economy perspective fits the Malaysian case well. Electoral rules have been written to lend disproportionate weight to rural Malay districts, while semiauthoritarian governments in power – for decades, the UMNO-led BN – have heavily subsidized paddy cultivation in its many facets. Nor can we say that ethnic politicization has lessened with the BN now out of

Kingdon 1995, chapter 8; Battilana and Casciaro 2012). Krueger further writes that governments must have "the political resources to undertake action *and the technocratic support to take appropriate actions*" (1993, p. 126, emphasis in the original).

147 Many of these technocrats have served in government positions at times of their careers.

148 On the growing effectiveness of reform-oriented networks in the Philippines, see Sidel and Faustino (2020).

149 Zainal and Bhattasali 2008, pp. 31–32.

150 This based on my reading of and research familiarity with the press in these cases over decades. The argument is not that these editorials necessarily had a direct causal effect, but their appearances (or not) are surely reflective of a broader politics of what is possible.

power. Under these conditions, it is understandable why government technocrats have shied from publicly attacking administration policies on paddy and rice. Even when the PH pulled Bernas's import monopoly, it had more to do with galvanizing anti-UMNO sentiments than a commitment to liberalization as a matter of economic principle or public welfare. The PH put the policy change in its campaign manifesto without expecting to govern. Therefore, voters, not technocrats, forced the PH's hand, so to speak. Nor do we know with certainty that the PH would have chosen liberalization ultimately as the basis of its policy reform. (Chapter 3 casts doubt on this option). Put differently, in making his decision, Duterte was unfettered by considerations of redistribution and politicized policymaking along ethnic lines to the extent premiers in Malaysia have had and continue to face. In the Philippines, the historical incorporation of elites across regions under the Catholic Church has dulled the hard edge of ethnic politicization.[151]

Just as Duterte may have been unencumbered by the delicate complications of ethnic redistribution and policymaking that prevail in Malaysia, he was similarly unburdened by a potent historical lineage of peasant nationalism that pervades Indonesia. If Malaysian technocrats do not pen public appeals to marketize rice imports because of *ethnic* sensitivities, in Indonesia they rarely do because of certain *historical* sensibilities. More specifically, the force of peasant valorization in the founding ideology and mythology of the Indonesian state compared to those in the Malaysian and Philippine cases has contributed significantly to the wide unpopularity of rice liberalization. Thus, it is more politically perilous for an Indonesian president to pursue this course of policy action. Because of the strength of agrarian nationalism, the sense that the Indonesian nation must protect paddy growers, owing to the historical roles they have played in informing national history and identity, is readily pronounced. Indonesian state elites have been sensitive to the charge of not defending the so-called common man or ordinary rice cultivator against an onslaught of cheap rice imports; Yudhoyono was a prime example (Chapter 4). The potency of this discourse helps to explain why Indonesian politicians refuse support for liberalization in rice.

As covered in Chapter 1, capitalizing on rural destitution, in the 1930s, Soekarno and other nationalist leaders showcased the rice farmer (*petani*) as a powerful and authentically Indonesian symbol to express the ideals of struggle for freedom and from international capitalist exploitation. Subsequent events helped to deepen these emotional beliefs in national

[151] Cullinane 2004. Exceptions to the general point include the Muslim south and some matters pertaining to upland indigenous peoples, but not rice policy per se.

political discourse. The countryside hosted much of the anticolonial revolutionary violence, where peasant volunteers defended their villages and battled against the returning Dutch army in the name of independence. (Factual accuracy of these events is of secondary importance in the national imagination.) The erection of Soekarno's *Tugu Tani* statue in central Jakarta ably captures such sentiments (Figure 1.1).

This agrarianism perhaps could have faded with time. But it was rescued and redoubled by Soeharto's own, though belated, focus on rural development and the production success of his Green Revolution project, even if ironically doing so perpetuated Soekarno's influence on the country's ideological development and imagination (and regardless of whether Soeharto spearheaded the massacres of hundreds of thousands of smallholders in the name of eliminating the PKI). Fifty years on from Soeharto's rice self-sufficiency achievement, and more than thirty years since the fall of the New Order, pride in production nationalism and peasant valorization retain an unmistakable salience in Indonesia beyond that which exists in the Philippines.

Despite a lineage of peasant radicalism in the Philippine Islands, that peasantry's revolutionary role in defeating the Spanish was eclipsed by a conservative landlord class that opportunistically cauterized the movement's populist excesses. Neither had Rizal beforehand embraced the peasant as a symbolic defender of national sovereignty, or as a special vessel containing precolonial essences. Following a brutal counterinsurgency led by Americans against so-called insurrectionists, national elites in the main sought cooperation with the new colonial regime in exchange for material and status rewards. The Huk rebellion of the 1950s and 1960s never threatened Manila and was eventually defeated by local counterinsurgency forces, along with US material help. All the while, the initial urban focus of the new CCP stymied robust linkages with the countryside, and just enough land reform has been enacted by the state over the years to neutralize agrarian radicalism. In short, Indonesia's national elites, whose power traditionally has not derived from large land holdings, ideologically has striven to extol the peasantry. Counterparts in the Philippines, whose power has traditionally derived from large land holdings, have not. Rather, they have been at constant pains either corralling or controlling that peasantry. This difference aided in freeing Duterte from the constraints of a formative ideology of peasant nationalism to pursue historic reform of his country's import regime.

In conclusion, Duterte pursued liberalization, however partial, without the impetus of an exogenous shock or absent overbearing external pressure. This observation in turn obliged us to scrutinize internal reasons for upending decades of institutionalized protectionist rice policy in order to

draw out the distinctiveness of the Philippine case. Among them were an institutionally powerful presidency that enables executive autonomy to pursue drastic policy reform; a more moderate version of an anticolonial ideology of agrarian nationalism, unlike in Indonesia; and a near-absence of Malaysia's ethnically politicized rice policymaking. The converse of the argument thereby reveals a certain combination of middling executive power, substantial parties, vibrant agrarian nationalism, and ethnically infused policymaking as inhibitors to reform.

Conclusion

> The rosy blush of its laughing heir … seems also to be irretrievably fading, and the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs.
>
> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958 [1904/5])

Rice is a quintessential political crop; any study on the grain in Asia invariably will comment on its political properties. Yet what yields these attributes is often left open-ended, finer mechanisms and broader processes underexamined. By making several contributions to scholarship, this book served as an instructive counterweight to pedestrian generalizations.

Rice Politics in Southeast Asia strove to account for the origins and decades-long institutionalization of a distinctive rice policy model across three separate states – Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Salient similarities among them warranted comparative historical investigation – rice as a societal staple, a history of smallholder poverty and minority trader exploitation, modernizing economies with broadly approximate levels of development, the presence of competitive elections, prevailing paddy and peasant romanticizing, net-importing status, and state intervention in the cereal's trade. Conceived of as a package of policies, protectionism in these cases has comprised the spending of high levels of public resources on campaigns to raise self-sufficiency rates, the setting of domestic rice prices typically above world levels as an incentive for growers to plant more paddy, and the importing of rice by a quasi-state monopoly. The parastatals that have arranged these purchases – Bernas, Bulog, the NFA – have stood as organizational embodiments of market intervention.

To contribute to the agricultural protectionist literature in general and on rice in particular, this book engaged with three prominent explanations. A cultural claim hypothesizes that the special place rice commands in these societies scuttles the type of policymaking predicated on cost-benefit accounting that can rid the sector of its inefficiencies. While this study did not deny the cultural properties of rice, especially when such views are espoused by important policymakers and polit-

icians, it did question whether this particular proposition adequately specifies the mechanisms through which culture translates into policy-making. Consider the transformative Green Revolution, this analysis's key independent variable. Neither its origins nor its surges in yields and in farm and off-farm income were culturally determined. Nor do citizens of these countries uniformly and blindly welcome overpaying for rice because of its celebrated cultural status. Among them some local policy elites have treated the commodity as an instrumental means to curb inflation and ultimately reduce poverty through the liberalization of its trade. That this policy change was actualized in the Philippines in 2019 under the Duterte presidency cultural confounds cultural reasoning.

The preceding chapters put more stock in political economy frameworks for elaborating agricultural protectionism. Recounting the extensive corruption and rent-seeking in costly paddy programs and in state-supervised importations substantiated the utility of a vested interests perspective. It did similarly for APE. It showcased the manipulation of electoral rules to concentrate districts with a bloc of farm votes that has proven electorally expedient, with Malaysia representing an outstanding case. But the comparative historical method this research deployed also spotlighted notable shortcomings of these analytical schemas.

Rice Politics in Southeast Asia contributes to the agricultural protectionist literature in its advocacy for grounded accounts of changing temporal processes, something which vested interests and APE, let alone culture, handle less well. Any authoritative understanding must pertain to the origins of the particular protectionist model realized in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. At its core lies the contingent success of the Green Revolution, an underappreciated yet pivotal commonality among these countries. I maintained that achievement in this Cold War paddy growing campaign, while not uniform across the cases in all facets, embodied a critical juncture. Budding forces coalesced to alter embedded development and political trajectories irrevocably, after which possibilities of new paths opened. Rapid improvement in rice production from the late 1960s to the early 1980s legitimized a prior but ineffective strategy for rice provisioning – intervention. This changed with the advent of the state-led Green Revolution. Regimes that oversaw the large-scale project gained unprecedented resources and strength to plan and to penetrate local society, and, with their existence in the balance, were motivated to succeed like never before. For decades, that success legitimized the institutionalization of protectionism, which was undergirded by the pride of special actors that I called production nationalists; they foiled post-Green Revolution market reform efforts of external actors and local technocrats. This drawn-out policy battle between

state-managed prescriptions and market-based blueprints has been not only about cultural attachments, predatory interests, or electoral concerns. It has also been a product of Green Revolution glory and the pride the project generated that gave rise to a distinctive yet underappreciated form of nationalism, that of production nationalism.

Two corollaries follow from this finding. The first is paying emotions more causal heed. Doing so buttresses the challenge of ideational studies in historical institutional analysis to the predominant rational variant that privileges material interests, strategic action, exogenous preference formation, and deductive reasoning. Ideas, however, are not the sole resource in exposing the a priori assumptions, universalistic stretch, and context-light feature of rational choice institutionalism. Like ideas, such social emotions as pride emerge from tangible historical experience, providing powerful impetus to act. Ideas and emotions can be difficult to disentangle – if an idea is to motivate a group of actors to change the way politics is conducted, to establish a new institution, organization, or community, or to reform policies applied to a societal problem, that collective must have pride in the idea. Otherwise, it is unlikely to stick.

The second corollary concerns APE and the moderately mechanical way it theorizes the onset and implications of protectionist policies. Its approach rests on an empirical constant, whether it is remarkable long-term agricultural success in Japan or its converse in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet this book evinces a more dynamic, unpredictable interaction between protectionism and performance over time. It traced protectionism's pre-Green Revolution struggles, its Green Revolution–led turnaround, its endurance amid the programs' demise, and its defeat in one of the three cases. This kind of protean historical lineage seems to defy APE's determinism.

For the regimes that oversaw the Green Revolution, enhanced rice provisioning capabilities bolstered social stability and assisted them in propelling their increasingly authoritarian rule. If it is acceptable to state that the Green Revolution was a political project, designed to overcome the possibility of mass starvation and in turn Communism, then it makes little sense to confine its politics to the paddyfields. Ramifications shaped cardinal regime characteristics – their coerciveness, their centralizing powers, their conservativism, their reach into local society, their pro-West orientation, their durability, and their developmentalism. Understanding the Cold War and its aftermath without sustained reference to the impact Green Revolution is limiting. More generally, by retraining focus on the magnitude of this enormous program, this study presented a case for the inseparability of regime building from the implementation of major development schemes. Like ideas and emotions, the

two unfold in entangled realms. Their analysis needs to reflect this messy reality.

With success secured, the Green Revolution's foreign funders turned to supporting nascent industrialization. But prideful production nationalists parried efforts to abolish the cultivation campaign and to open rice markets, the policy choices the West now preferred as cost-saving efficiency measures. The production nationalists, amid the afterglow of paddy triumphalism, however, fell victim to their success. Hastened by the Green Revolution, food-crop agriculture's share in these structurally transforming economies declined rapidly. For decades, at the heart of fierce debates over rice policy – and by extension, poverty alleviation and development – sat contested legacies of the Green Revolution.

A corporeal element of this contestation was the resilience of what I termed rice import regimes. The Green Revolution, after all, enabled the state not only to increase its control over the provisioning of domestic rice but also the purchasing of its foreign variety. With paddy production rates erratic and unreliable during the Green Revolution's early phase, large Western-financed imports safeguarded food security, and in turn these regimes' own security. Covetous state elites scrambled to capture from ethnic Chinese traders this imported bounty whose beguiling profits were, and continue to be, driven by gaping price differentials between net exporters and net importers. Governments in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia each granted a wildly valuable monopoly import license to a food parastatal; alongside production nationalism, this book identified this permit as an integral mechanism in protectionism's institutionalization. Consonant with the vested interests viewpoint, the parastatals distributed monopoly rents through expansive patronage networks. I took issue, however, with the functionalist bent of this otherwise useful depiction, for it misses the wider contentions that pervade domestic politics. Since executive preference is divided among competing imperatives, the discretion of authority is not wholly consumed by rent-seeking. The logic of vested interests argumentation, for instance, inaccurately infers an incremental rise in rice imports on a per annum basis to satiate patronage networks.

Yet, like the tide or the temperature, rice imports rise and fall over time. Electoral proximity plays its part in this pattern. Executives may over-import to reduce rice prices in order to woo urban voters; at other times, as in Indonesia, they under-import to burnish their populist bona fides, to demonstrate fidelity to the country's "peasant heroes." Beyond electoral proximity, Philippine presidents have squeezed import volumes to burnish their own good governance bona fides, to distinguish oneself from a predecessor who abused rice imports egregiously. Or in the case

of Malaysia's privatized Bernas, rice imports become the financial staple in support of a share price. In all cases, food security mandates have allowed imports for rice reserves whose volumes are closed to public scrutiny. From these examples, we take away the crucial point that decision-making veered from the dictates of filling consumption-production gaps, unlike assumptions of the mainstream literature on food security. This body of work likewise accepts the objectivity of the data upon which the gap is determined. This book laid these assumptions to rest. For decades, data has been susceptible to opportunistic manipulation by importing interests and production nationalists alike. All told, if there is consensus that rice is a political crop, then surely so must be its imports. But few have extended the logic of the observation in comparative historical analysis. This book made a modest step in this direction.

Nor does the vested interests contention or that of APE address how rice import regimes and patronage networks conform to broader circuitries of national power. A contextual domestic politics approach that this book adopts can. Conceptually, rice import regimes reflect larger structural fields of power in each country in which they are embedded. Take Indonesia's rice import regime, which transformed as the country democratized in the late 1990s. Centralized authoritarian control by Bulog, Soeharto, and his cronies and family members transitioned to a system where electoral success has unlocked access to state largess for a coalition of party elites. A weaker party system in the Philippines facilitated rent distribution through a network of beneficiaries, such as presidential insiders, NFA management, and large trader associations, more so than party structures. In Malaysia, ethnic and party considerations have predominated. As Mahathir privatized the LPN in the mid-1990s, he ensured that state functionaries and UMNO's elite would stand to gain from Bernas's capital accumulation. He also compelled Bernas to supervise the same service obligations once mandated to the LPN to prop up Malay farming income for electoral purposes. APE may account for the latter, but less so for the former.

Lastly, vested interests and APE angles fare poorly in circumstances of reform. Their reasoning favors protectionism's continuity, perhaps until a formidable exogenous shock disrupts the system's rent-seeking predilections or electoral usefulness. None of the region's recent crises, however – from the AFC of the late 1990s and the 2008 regional rice crisis to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 – triggered the most dramatic policy change that these three rice sectors have undergone since the Green Revolution, that is, President Duterte's 2019 liberalization. (Indonesia's IMF-imposed liberalization during the AFC was short-lived.) I noted a modicum of external pressure as a result of negotiations

for the Philippines to join the WTO in the mid-1990s, which led to the adoption of a complicated quantitative restrictions system for rice imports. Yet this condition did not compel Duterte's predecessors to liberalize, although discussions on the matter were held. Instead, I concluded that endogenous factors over time coalesced to inform markedly Duterte's historic decision. His economic policy czar, who enjoyed enviable influence over the administration, represented a pro-market technocratic policy faction that has long persevered to pierce the country's protectionist walls. And owing to the strength of the Philippine presidency, Duterte was unencumbered in following the recommendation of his influential "reform champion" on taming inflation. With a malleable party system and broad powers invested in the presidential office, congressional obstructions failed to materialize. Unlike in the case of Malaysian premiers, nor did the ethnic implications of marketization impede the combative Philippine president. And in contrast to Indonesian counterparts, Duterte was unburdened by a profound nationalist past that assertively promotes the peasant as a premier symbol of the defense of the country's unfettered freedom and sovereignty. Pride in the more recent Green Revolution has redoubled the potency of this nationalist narrative.

That said, future reform, or the rollback of reform enacted, cannot be discounted. Exogenous interference in Indonesia; the PH's near-miss experience, because of the ability of Malaysian elections to function as a change agent; and the autonomy of the Philippine presidency, the same factor that had expedited Duterte's turnabout in the first place, constitute harbingers of prospective possibilities. Neither liberalization nor protectionism is inevitable or predetermined; each is contingent on contentious political processes and historical outcomes whose legacies bend to sweeping winds of power and crippling disputes over reinterpretation. The intertwining of rice protectionism and import regimes is exemplary of today's longstanding institutions that remain "under pressure" from changing market forces, shifting political currents, and competing ideas over the suitability of state, market, or hybrid forms of capitalism in the pursuit of economic growth and technological upgrading.[1] Institutional and policy success creates enduring yet perplexing legacies. The political tussles over their deployment regularly outlive the initial efficacy of the institutions and policies themselves. That is a primary lesson we learn from putting a nonfunctional appreciation of politics into practice.

[1] Hamilton-Hart and Yeung 2021.

Extending the Arguments

Core arguments of *Rice Politics in Southeast Asia* are applicable beyond the region; constructive comparisons can be made with the Northeast Asian cases of Japan and South Korea. Facilitating factors include rice protectionism, rice as a national staple with abundant cultural resonance, production nationalism, domestic rice prices residing above international market levels, and competitive elections where patronage figures prominently.[2] Undeniably, the Japanese and South Korean states are stronger than those of this book's primary cases, and these societies have greater levels of economic prosperity (approximately US$33,000 and US $34,000 GDP per capita, respectively). But they too are confronting aging farmer populations, external pressure, especially from the United States, to further liberalize their rice sectors, growing urban-rural inequality, and local anti-globalization movements or similar anti-modernity sentiments whose adherents assert idioms that valorize the paddy farmer. These aspects are not unfamiliar to the experiences of net importers of Southeast Asia.

The political economy of rice in Japan most resembles that of Malaysia, albeit absent unstinting ethnic tensions. Japan is viewed as a paradigmatic APE case where governments steadfastly have used institutions as conduits to distribute substantial resources to the dwindling rural sector for electoral purposes.[3] Following WWII, a tripartite alliance formed among the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF), and the peak organizations of national Japanese Agricultural Cooperatives (JAC). Allocated by the LDP, vast resources were channelled by MAFF bureaucrats to farming communities and local cooperatives via the JAC. In exchange, the JAC reliably rendered the large farm bloc of votes to the conservative LDP, aiding its domination of elections from the 1950s to the 1990s. As in Malaysia, the electoral over-representation of rural districts added to the clout of this party machinery. So did the JAC's large investments in the nonagricultural sectors of the rural economy, which construction companies warmly appreciated.[4]

Japan's extravagant financing of the food-crop sector has transferred urban household income to farmers via rice prices that consistently top international levels. Beyond favoring larger farmers who market their harvests, policies that shielded farmers from international competition also incentivized them to stay on the farm, so to speak, even if increasing

[2] This feature excludes China from consideration.
[3] Anderson and Hayami 1986; Hayami 2007. [4] Mulgan 2000.

portions were farmed part-time. Efforts to stem further declines in paddy production and in rural population have been met with mixed results. Owing to Japan's greater wealth, high rice prices have had less adverse development implications than they have had in our Southeast Asian cases. Distorted resource allocation, nonetheless, has not been negligible.[5]

It has been long purported that Japanese consumers have willingly paid elevated prices due to taste preferences and high degrees of trust placed in the safety, or purity, of domestic rice. Put in the context of this book's argument, the production nationalists of the MAFF and the JAC, along with the Japanese population at large, have evinced unmistakable pride in their country's skilled rice production capability.[6] Japan has been home to a long legacy of an early green revolution – one that was internally induced – starting in the 1880s when paddy yields and agricultural labor productivity boomed, which thereby underpinned the economy's shift toward industrialization.[7]

The foundations of this mainstay belief, however, have loosened of late, as the global food economy has made inroads in the country. For decades, Japanese governments refused rice imports to the objections of exporters, especially those in the US. Wanting to widen access to global markets for its rice exporters, the US government used Japan's intent to join the WTO to make headway.[8] In the mid-1990s, the latter agreed to import small quantities of the foodstuff, of which it has remained compliant since. (Like that of the late New Order, Japan did succumb to external pressures to liberalize other nonrice agricultural sectors.)

Even though Japan did not undergo full rice liberalization – high tariff and nontariff barriers persist – the change in policy did reveal demographic and political economic shifts. As urban consumers' connections with rural society have attenuated, their acceptance of high-cost domestic rice has ebbed. That in 2025 Japanese consumers surprisingly welcomed the importing of Korean rice on account of sharply rising prices due to local shortages attests to this observation.[9] Moreover, the MAFF, certain business interests – such as food manufacturers and general trading firms – and factions within the LDP, which has faced electoral competition from the opposition, have acknowledged the crisis afflicting Japanese agriculture. Such pressing challenges as an ageing farmer population and top-down agricultural organizations that have been privileging their interests over that of small-scale producers mirror issues recognizable

[5] Mulgan 2006. [6] Sato 2001. [7] Hayami 1975. [8] McMichael and Kim 1994.
[9] "Japan Imports Korean Rice for the First Time in Decades amid Soaring Prices," www.ajupress.com, April 21, 2025 (last accessed May 24, 2025).

to Southeast Asians. LDP leadership has still deflected the blame for unpopular market reforms onto external agents like the US and the WTO.[10] Akin to the case of partial rice liberalization in the Philippines, trade reform in Japan has been influenced by internal developments as much as external factors.

As for South Korea, its own authoritarian-managed Green Revolution has produced a lasting pride in the achievement with political effect. In 1961, General Park Chung Hee overthrew a civilian government. US-trained technocrats directed the bulk of Park's economic policy, similar to the Philippines and Indonesia, with focus on jumpstarting export-oriented industrialization. Yet the South Korean dictator was keen to tackle rural poverty alleviation. At the time, his country's GDP per capita was roughly on par with that of Java, and rice consumption supplied half the daily caloric intake of the average Korean. Food aid, notably via the US PL 480 program, supplied the non-Communist regime with ample rice imports to buttress political and social stability.[11] Park diverted sizable public resources into a paddy growing campaign. As in Southeast Asia, the option of paddyland expansion was mostly unavailable to policymakers. Once new MVs, developed in collaboration with IRRI, were ready for distribution, Park's government provided the infrastructure, including storage facilities and locally produced cement, as well as subsidized credit to purchase chemical fertilizers. Coordinated efforts of state agencies accelerated the use of the new technology by producers.[12] In 1975, one agricultural expert wrote that the "grain management programs represent one of the largest nondefense activities of the Korean government."[13]

Starting in 1970, Park's government implemented a modernization village program to greater degrees, and by many accounts to greater fruition, than this book's primary cases. The New Village Movement (NVM) promoted self-help voluntarism; under authoritarian conditions, local government interference was inescapable. With a spike in the application of chemical fertilizers by cultivators, rice production rose from four million metric tons in 1970 to six million only seven years later, when the country reached self-sufficiency.[14] To motivate villagers, NVM officials championed an ideology that espoused a spirit of cooperation that purportedly drew on traditional Korean values. The communal singing of nationalist-inspired songs was exemplary.[15]

[10] In this case, more specifically, pressures to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (earlier were the WTO and free-trade agreements) (Maclachlan and Shimzu 2016).
[11] Pal 1975, especially pp. 381, 399. [12] Burmeister 1987. [13] Pal 1975, p. 393.
[14] Burmeister 1987, p. 776, table 1. [15] Douglass 2013; Jung 2020.

Criticisms of the NVM invoke those laid against the Green Revolution in Southeast Asia. Not only were concerns raised over unhealthy dependence on chemical fertilizers and on MVs at the expense of traditional varietals, but statistics also were juiced to appease government superiors. In the end, the production campaign proved financially unsustainable as well. Drawdowns of public funding accompanied the country's 1980s democratization, with voters concentrated in urban areas. Furthermore, because the NVM's promotion of rural industrialization faltered, income disparity between the urban and rural sectors worsened. Like that of Malaysia, followed by Indonesia and the Philippines, farm mechanization in South Korea did grow apace, helping to ameliorate some of the labor shortages caused by sizable urban migration.[16]

Like that of Japan, South Korea agreed to a narrow opening of rice imports – equivalent to one percent of domestic consumption – as part of its WTO ascension negotiations.[17] Rather than furthering the discussion on the implications of the international trade regime, I end this comparison with an example taken from South Korea's domestic politics that shares commonalities with that of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia.

The political afterlife of the NVM has been fueled by a certain pride in achieving the extraordinary. In research about the 2012 election won by Park's daughter, its authors found that the former NVM rural townships voted heavily in favor of Park Geun-Hye. The study concluded that these villagers did not back Park for financial reasons: They did not overly benefit, for example, from cash transfers compared to other townships. Nor did Park make unrealistic promises to rejuvenate the NVM by directing state resources to these villages. Instead, their voting behavior is better explained by efforts to hold onto the vestiges of pride in their past paddy accomplishments under the direction of Park's father, a nostalgia that Park's campaign promoted vigorously. For these voters, the conservative candidate symbolized a time when the state paid them the due attention and respect that they felt they deserved.[18] Other research similarly notes that "the secret" to the lasting popularity of the NVM "lies in the fact that many people identify it with Korea's modernization, and subsequent economic success, and thus cherish it along with their own bittersweet memories of passionate youth."[19] Likewise, observations – nostalgic pride in the feats of strongmen fathers – have been put forth to explain the decisive 2002 presidential victory of Bombong Jr., the

[16] Douglass 2013. [17] Hong and Cheng 2011. [18] Hong, Park, and Yang 2022.
[19] Han 2004, p. 79.

son of the production nationalist Ferdinand Marcos.[20] The vast difference in the strength of state institutions between these two cases had little bearing on either presidential outcome.

Final Words: The Future

To conclude this study of rice politics in three post-Green Revolution countries in Southeast Asia, I tentatively ponder the prospects of their rice industries. Change is afoot. Diets evolve and diversify as incomes grow. Malaysians, Filipinos, and Indonesians are eating more wheat-based products at unprecedented rates, a trend that will deepen dependency on the international market for these nonwheat-growing countries. Although state elites may pretend or publicize otherwise, safeguarding national food security requires engaging with international trade for the foreseeable future. While citizens are eating less rice, they are purchasing more of it from supermarkets, which has wrought substantial change to traditional marketing systems.[21] People's incomes are on the rise – and the reach of supermarkets is expanding – because national economies are modernizing. Pressure on paddyfields for conversion to activities of higher economic value, from housing estates to the planting of fruits and vegetables, is mounting. Reduction in acreage devoted to rice growing, for some, accords with changing labor patterns – fewer farmers are relying on paddy planting for their main source of livelihood, as income diversification has become the standard.[22] Supplanting labor with mechanization and especially chemically intensive cultivation methods – for example, in weeding – increases risks of environmental harm; even Green Revolution champions now realize this. Reliance on chemical fertilizers coincidentally also demands trust in the international market, despite its susceptibility to wild price swings. This is especially so for the components that compose fertilizers whose trade is vulnerable to disruptions of global supply chains.

Climate change exacerbates these worries. It will create untold headwinds for paddy cultivation. Increasingly variable rainfall and hotter nighttime temperatures will alter planting patterns and squeeze productivity irrevocably.[23] In response, IRRI and other research centers are

[20] Ruud and Engelsen 2022, esp. p. 406; Dulay, Hicken, Menon, *et al.* 2023. Cases have been made for the massive online misinformation campaign about the "achievements" of Martial Law (Coronel 2022) and the pervasiveness of fake news in the Philippines in general (Arugay and Baquisal 2022). Yet, as this book has stressed, the achievements of the Green Revolution were considerable and real.

[21] Reardon, Timmer, Barrett, et al. 2003.

[22] Rigg 2001, chapters 1 and 6.

[23] Rosegrant, Yohe, Ewing, et al. 2010; Zhu, Kobayashi, Loladze, et al. 2018.

developing flood- and drought-resistant varieties to address today's climate crisis. It is unlikely, however, that the massive aid mobilization that is needed to implement this new technology extensively will be met with the same urgency that had accompanied the Green Revolution.

Technological advance in varietals is also enhancing the nutritional capacity of rice; the development of Golden Rice in the Philippines is a noteworthy example. Despite such efforts to overcome vitamin A deficiency, especially in malnourished children, the prospects of genetically modified rice have galvanized considerable opposition to "Frankenstein" varieties, in part due to mistrust in unreliable and corruption-plagued regulatory systems. Trade-offs will have to be made accordingly.[24] Illustratively, rice cultivation produces emissions that contribute to greenhouse gases behind the warming climate, along with the transportation systems that deliver imports to the ports and beyond. It has become less acceptable for assessments of economic globalization to ignore negative environmental externalities.[25]

Amid the steep challenges to provide cheap, nutritious food while protecting the environment and farmers' incomes, continuities remain steadfast. State elites fixate on rice as the crop that defines food security and privilege availability over access. Barren rice bazars amount to political suicide; the publication of photos of urban consumers lining up to receive rationed portions of rice strikes fear into politicians almost as much as "food riots" do. Belief in the international market to provide the grain in adequate volume at affordable prices at all times thereby wavers. Rice prices had shown a slow, steady decline that, for some, made the market option the obvious solution.[26] Yet the regularity of crises that leave states prone to supply shortages can justify market wariness. Contending with droughts and floods exacerbated by climate change is difficult enough to handle; reliance on the unaccountable policy decisions of exporting governments only worsens matters. The export bans of major suppliers like India and Vietnam spooked importing governments in 2008 and led to soaring rice prices that endangered the food security of hundreds of millions. The COVID-19 pandemic, starting in 2020, similarly unnerved governments with the potential to rupture global logistics that took decades to form. And when that rice crisis fortunately did not materialize, soon thereafter Russia invaded the wheat-exporting country of Ukraine in early 2022, roiling international markets for that grain. India then imposed another damaging rice export ban. The reality or

[24] Boquet 2017, pp. 283–86; Stone and Glover 2017. [25] Roberts and Lamp 2021.
[26] Dawe 2002.

inevitability of such disruptions frustrates a fuller embrace of a market-led food security strategy.

This turbulence can even weaken the resolve among the most trusting of state elites. Consider Singapore. It is often ranked as the most food secure country by organizations that compile such lists, owing to the country's openness and dense trade links. This has been necessitated by a severe land constraint; government figures put dependence on external sources for food at about 90 percent. But global instability has alarmed the city-state's pro-market policymakers, who are now hedging. Recently, they introduced a policy with the aim to generate 30 percent of local nutritional needs through domestic sources by 2030. Known as "30 by 30," the policy is leveraging the country's highly skilled human capital and proven track record in attracting foreign expertise and capital to become a hub in new urban agricultural techniques, including cultured meats.[27] If Singapore's neo-merchantalist state elites are increasingly nervous about over-reliance on the market to provide for food security, it is easy to imagine the anxiety the leadership of larger, less prosperous rice-deficit countries are feeling.

Nor is their fixation on rice simply a functional or natural outcome of being at a lower stage of development. The brief looks at Japan and South Korea above challenge the widely held belief that through prosperity, governments will almost axiomatically overcome politicized decision-making on rice or their protectionist behavior. In these wealthy countries, the cereal still plays a considerable role in diets, even if on a per capita basis less than in years past. Meanwhile, research has shown the surprising staying power of small-scale paddy growers against predictions of economic theory.[28] This reality renders democratic governments responsible for the welfare of rural citizens for political, social, and ethical reasons. These societies still hold steadfast to beliefs in the valor of agrarian pasts, even if evidence suggests fewer people want to live in the countryside and even fewer desire to toil in the mud and under the blazing sun to plant paddy. While the smaller numbers of paddy growers in Northeast Asia mean that fiscal transfers have become less burdensome for governments over time, these cases unquestionably establish that messy rice politics in its many forms endures well beyond what growth theory suggests. Importantly, the level of wealth of this book's cases remains far below that of their Northeast Asian counterparts;

[27] Montesclaros and Teng 2023.
[28] Rigg, Salamanca, and Thompson 2016. Developments in China, however, serve as an important exception (Zhang and Wu 2025).

accordingly, we can expect these sorts of rice politics to prevail in importing Southeast Asia for a long time.

In other words, the political drama that surrounds rice in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, highlighted by active state interventions, should persist. Even the FAO, a staunch advocate of a market approach to food security, has recently acknowledged the imperative of state support, including subsidies, in achieving sustainable food systems.[29] The FAO would be misguided, however, if it foresees the "repurposing" of subsidies unfurling along strict technocratic lines. Eliminating distributional forces is impractical, since food production, especially when it implicates national objectives, is always political.[30] Politics guides economic decision-making, not vice versa.[31] As *Rice Politics in Southeast Asia* has shown in considerable detail, the Green Revolution was foremost a state-led political project, and even its gross inefficiencies did not decidedly derail its success. But the contingency of that period is unlikely to repeat. If anything, the history this study highlighted demonstrates that those who disproportionately benefit from rice politics are those who control the crop in large volumes, unstintingly at the expense of those who grow it in smaller quantities, whether trade is open or protected, or whether prevailing governments are democratic or authoritarian or of a hybrid model somewhere in between. That story is the odds-on scenario to repeat itself.

[29] FAO 2003; FAO 2021.
[30] Paarlberg 2010; Herring 2015; Hamilton 2018.
[31] Hall 1986, chapter 1.

Appendix A Chronology of Executive Authority

Indonesia

Soekarno	1945–59 (President)
Mohammad Natsir	1950–51 (Prime Minister)
Sukiman Wirjosandjojo	1951–52 (Prime Minister)
Wilopo	1952–53 (Prime Minister)
Ali Sastroamidjojo	1953–55 (Prime Minister)
Burhanuddin Harahap	1955–56 (Prime Minister)
Ali Sastroamidjojo	1956–57 (Prime Minister)
Djuanda Kartawidjaja	1957–59 (Prime Minister)
Soekarno	1959–67 (President)
Soeharto	1967–98 (President)
B.J. Habibie	1998–99 (President)
Abdurrahman Wahid	1999–2001 (President)
Megawati Soekarnoputeri	2001–04 (President)
Susilo B. Yudhoyono	2004–14 (President)
Joko Widodo	2014–24 (President)
Prabowo Subianto	2024– (President)

The Philippines (Presidents)

Emilio Aguinaldo	1898–1901
Manuel Quezon	1935–44
Jose Laurel	1943–45
Sergio Osmeña	1944–46
Manuel Roxas	1946–48
Elpidio Quirino	1948–53
Ramon Magsaysay	1953–57
Carlos Garcia	1957–61
Diosdado Macapagal	1961–65
Ferdinand Marcos	1965–86
Corazon Aquino	1986–92
Fidel Ramos	1992–98

Joseph Estrada	1998–2001
Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo	2001–10
Benigno Aquino III	2010–16
Rodrigo Duterte	2016–22
Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.	2022–

Malaysia (Prime Ministers)

Tunku Abdul Rahman	1957–70
Abdul Razak Hussein	1970–76
Hussein Onn	1976–81
Mahathir Mohamad	1981–2003
Abdullah Ahmad Badawi	2003–09
Najib Razak	2009–18
Mahathir Mohamad	2018–20
Muhyiddin Yassin	2020–21
Ismail Sabri Yaakob	2021–22
Anwar Ibrahim	2022–

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